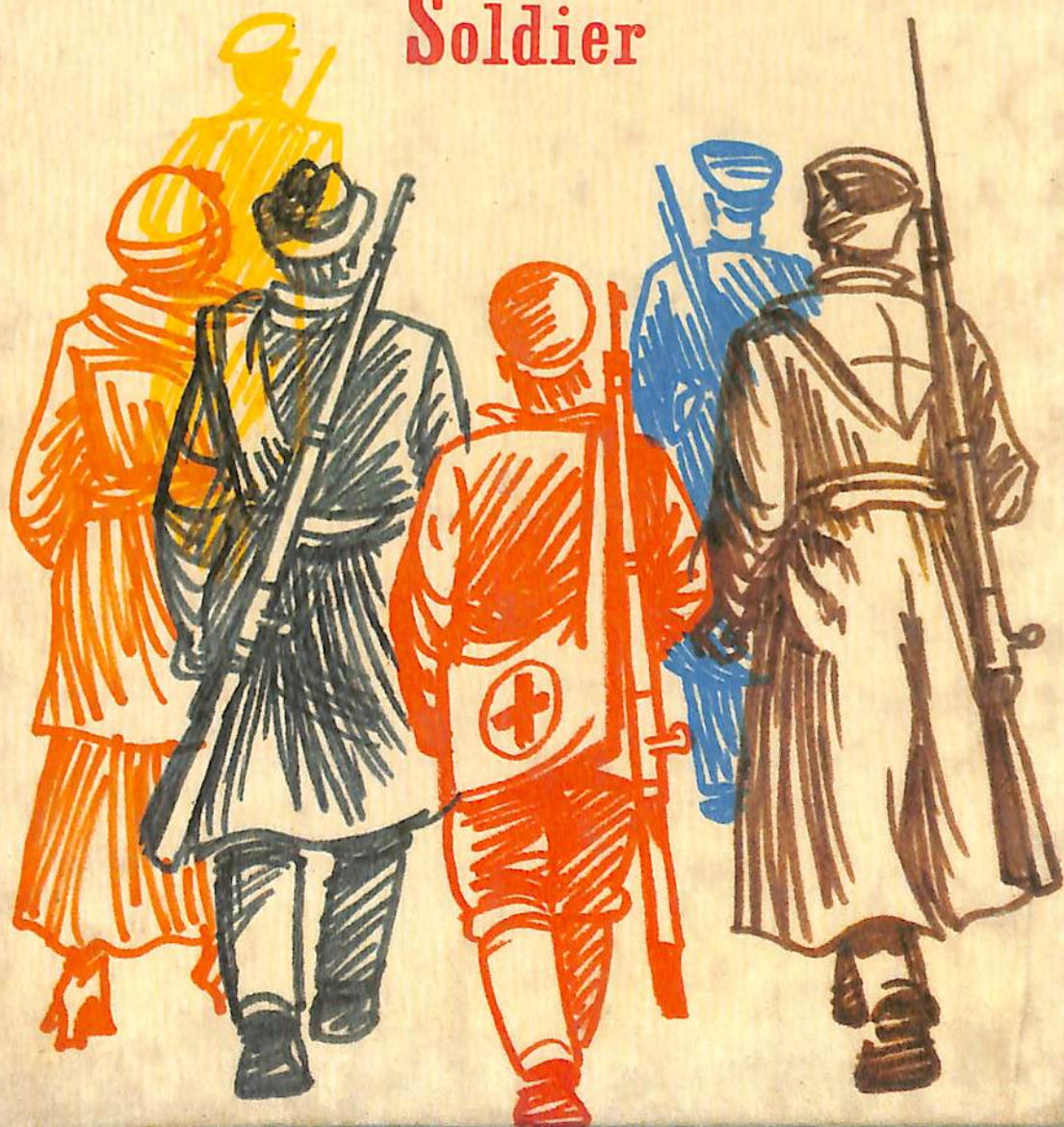


OLEG TIKHOMIROV

GRASSHOPPER

the Little
Soldier









OLEG TIKHOMIROV .

GRASSHOPPER
THE LITTLE SOLDIER



RADUGA PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW

Translated from the Russian by *Miriam Katz*

Illustrated by *Victor Kirillov*

О. Тихомиров

КУЗНЕЧИК

На английском языке

© Издательство «Молодая гвардия», 1974
English translation © Raduga Publishers 1985

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ISBN 5-05-000058-0

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Author's Foreword	4
If I Had a Magic Wand	6
Roasted Sunflower Seeds	24
Mikhei Mikheyevich and His Cookies	30
Runaway	41
Fyodor the Apprentice, or a Viper in the Bosom	49
"War!.."	65
The Student Kostya	71
Poring Over a Book	84
The Lieutenant's Little Batman	90
Cook, Scribe and Scout	98
In a Listening Post	112
The Hospital Train	117
Behind a Counter	122
October	130
An Empty Revolver	138
"...My Barricade"	152

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Until quite recently very little was known about Alyosha Kuznetsov, a 15-year-old Moscow boy who fell in battle in 1917 at the time of the October Revolution in Russia.

Alyosha and his sister Lena were members of a mobile first-aid group—a “alying squad”. The boy was never in one spot for long, he always hastened to the most dangerous places—the barricades manned by volunteers fighting the counter-revolutionary White Guard.

Not everyone on the barricades even knew Alyosha's proper name. They just called him “Kuznechik”—Grasshopper—a pun on his surname, Kuznetsov. The boy actually did appear to make flying leaps from one barricade to another, so quickly did he get around.

The brother and sister gave first aid to many wounded fighters. On October 28 they were both hit by enemy bullets on Ostozhenka (now Metrostroyevskaya Street), one of the streets where the heaviest battles were fought.

For a long time it was thought that the Kuznetsovs had both been killed—their death was mentioned in the memoirs of participants in those battles. However, although Alyosha did die of his wounds, his sister Yelena (Lena) recovered, and after the Revolution went back to the Givartovsky Textile Mill, where she had worked before.

Today this enterprise is the Thaelmann Lace Curtain Factory. Yelena Kuznetsova worked there for many years, the head of a work team in a leading section.

When our country was exposed to grim trials, when the Nazis were straining to capture Moscow, Yelena was a roof guard, one of those who watched out for incendiary bombs dropped by the Nazis: she dug anti-tank ditches and spent many sleepless nights in a hospital caring for wounded soldiers. She was awarded the medals For the Defence of Moscow and For Labour Valour in the Great Patriotic War.

Yelena Kuznetsova worked at the factory until 1950 and then retired on pension. She passed away at the beginning of the 1970s.

A group of Young Pathfinders from Moscow School No. 588 found Yelena Kuznetsova a short time before her death. If not for them we might have known nothing else about Alyosha but that he "fell in battle together with his sister."

The following historical narrative is based, to a great extent, on the information imparted by Yelena Kuznetsova.

The name of the young first-aid orderly Alyosha Kuznetsov has been entered for all time into the Book of Honour of the All-Union Young Pioneer Organisation (the Soviet Children's Organisation).



IF I HAD A MAGIC WAND...

It was a slightly frosty day and a light snow was falling.

Stamping his feet near a tray-stand and flapping his arms, the old man shouted from time to time in a high, bleating voice:

“Sugar roosters! Lollipops! Come one, come all, don’t be shy, just let your kopecks fly!”

Passers-by stopped. Exchanging a bit of banter with the old vendor, they bought his cheap sweets and shuffled away.

Only Mitya and Alyosha stood looking from afar at the old man and his wares. How they longed for a rooster apiece! Mitya said that the red ones were tastier, while Alyosha insisted that the yellow ones were sweeter because they had honey in them.

"How come you know so much, huh?" exclaimed Mitya.

Tipping his cap over one ear, Alyosha snorted angrily:

"How much, how little—your money's worth, that much!"

Mitya sighed sadly. Now why did Alyosha have to remind him of money? The boys had only a five-kopeck coin each—just enough to pay for admission to a show-booth. Generally speaking, a ticket cost ten kopecks, but on the day before the boys had talked a ticket-seller into promising to let them in for five kopecks each. So when they were already no more than a stone's throw from the show-booth they had to come across the old man and his roosters!

The lollipop vendor seemed to be teasing them.

"Sugar roosters, lollipops! Yellow and red, terribly tasty! Hurry, hurry, get yours before I take myself home to warm up on the stove!"

"Hear that?" Alyosha nudged Mitya.

"Hear what?"

"Terribly tasty, the old man says."

"Aha."

The boys stood still, rubbing the five-kopeck pieces in their pockets. The coins, as if covered with glue, wouldn't slip out of their fingers.

"Let's go," said Alyosha at last.

Mitya wanted to ask "Where to?"—to the show-booth or the vendor, but Alyosha was already heading toward the old man, so Mitya followed.

The boys bought a rooster apiece. The old man exclaimed:

"Why so stingy? Take a whole five kopeck's worth!"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed both boys together, backing off.

"Fools, that's what you are," said the old man, spitting in vexation. "I'd chew 'em myself, only I ain't got no teeth!"

Alyosha and Mitya turned and walked away, the lollipop sticks protruding from their mouths.

However, you can't keep a lollipop in your mouth too long—it'll melt.

Alyosha took his rooster out of his mouth, admired its yellow sheen, and then looked at Mitya's rooster. How red it was, like a live coal when you blow at it with all your might!

"Let's swap," offered Alyosha. "You take mine and give me yours, and then we'll swap back again."

So they made an exchange. But before they had walked more than a few paces Mitya exclaimed:

"Gimme back my rooster!"

"What's eating you, huh?"

"Nothing. You suck too fast."

"Look who's talking!"

So Mitya again sucked his red rooster and Alyosha his yellow one.

The wooden show-booth that was their cherished goal stood in the very centre of Devichye Polye (The

Maidens' Field—so named after a nearby convent). Actually, there were a number of booths there, each one giving its own performance. On holidays, when the Field was crowded with merry-makers, gaudily painted show-booths were opened up all over the place, as well as many little stalls in which cheap toys, trinkets, sweets and various odds and ends were sold.

The Field was a lively, noisy fairground. Laughter floated from all sides and a general uproar prevailed. Shopkeepers loudly praised their wares, barkers and ticket-sellers invited one and all to ride their merry-go-round, or come in and see the hair-raising play telling the story of Yeruslan-the-Brave and Liudmila the Beautiful, or attend a "one-and-only" circus performance.

"Show's begi-in-ning! Roll up, roll up, get your tickets!" they yelled.

A huge placard on the wall of the Yeruslan-the-Brave booth displayed a rosy-cheeked horseman on a white steed, a long sabre in his hand. Another show-booth advertised a truly ghastly spectacle: a huge board carried a painting of several black cannibals roasting over a fire a stout gentleman wearing a suit, bowler hat and shoes!

These placards made no particular impression on the boys. So there was a rider on a white horse? Big deal! Looked like a mounted policeman. So what? As for the blacks roasting the fat guy—why, they weren't even real blacks—just actors in blackface! Their friend Kiryusha had told them all about it—he'd already been to three show-booths. He'd said that when those made-up blacks do their roasting stunt you don't get

even the slightest whiff of roasting meat. It's all a put-up job.

But the third booth—the circus—that was where real miracles were shown! Kiryusha himself said so. Especially when the tall old man performed. "I was that scared," he confessed, "I nearly gave up the ghost, honest to goodness! He's a real wizard."

"Look, there he is, the wizard," exclaimed Mitya when they got to the third show-booth. He pointed to the signboards.

"As if I didn't know!" retorted Alyosha.

Some of the painted signs showed a tall, pale-faced old man in a top-hat, black suit and cape. The legend at the bottom read:

THE FAMOUS AND INCOMPARABLE KOFO— HERE AND NOWHERE ELSE!

"Our show's beginning! Hurry, hurry up! Don't miss your chance! Beginning right now!" cried the barker.

The boys barely managed to talk the ticket-lady into letting them in for their remaining coppers.

"Oh, all right—go in and stand in the gallery right by the wall," she finally gave in, taking pity on them.

The show-booth was full of people, and it smelled of glue and dampness. It was almost as cold inside as outside. The audience sat with upturned collars. Everybody was talking, eating little cakes or sweets. Somebody was loudly cracking nuts.

Having squirmed through to the wall, Alyosha and Mitya took their crumb-coated lollipops out of their pockets and stuck them into their mouths.

Somebody poked Mitya's shoulder. Turning his head, he saw the angry red face of a peasant—a *muzhik*—under a sheepskin cap with earflaps; he reeked of strong drink.

"Out—get out of here!" sputtered this individual.

"What's eating you, Unk?" asked Mitya in surprise.

"Nothing! Get lost, before I cuff your ears off!" he retorted, getting still redder, a threatening spark appearing in his little eyes.

"What's he done?" asked Alyosha, coming to his friend's aid.

"And you scram too!" The red-faced one tried to get up. "I know you good-for-nothings."

"But we've never seen you before!" said Alyosha, getting angry.

"Never seen me! Yesterday a couple of scamps like you were nosing around me and then a 15-kopeck piece was missing from my pocket!"

"We've no reason to pick pockets," retorted Alyosha. "You must be that kind yourself!"

"I'll show you!.." And the red-faced one got to his feet.

However, somebody on his other side pulled his arm and he collapsed into his seat.

Voices were immediately raised:

"What's the matter?"

"Pocket's been picked."

"So what?"

"So what! To you it's 'so what', and here's a man

had 15 kopecks stolen off him."

Questions now came tumbling like peas out of a torn sack: "Who?" "Whose pocket?" "When?"

The excitement on the gallery was cut short by the orchestra suddenly striking up. The curtain creakingly opened and a man in a dresscoat came out and announced that the first number would be presented by the public's favourites, Smack and Crack.

Two funny clowns jumped out of the wings and immediately began to pummel each other, exchanging slaps, kicks and blows. Falling all over themselves, they rushed about, shouting in high, shrill voices.

Mitya and Alyosha laughed so much they could hardly stand, while Red-Face, wiping the sweat off his forehead and cheeks with his fur cap, shouted:

"A killing number! A real caution!"

The clowns were followed by trained dogs who jumped through a hoop and waltzed while the orchestra discordantly played *On the Mounds of Manchuria*. Someone was so enthralled by the dance that he threw a ginger cooky onto the stage; this was followed by a dozen cakes and cookies and the number was disrupted. But all the same the audience shouted "Bravo!" "Encore!" over and over again and wouldn't let the lady-trainer leave the stage for quite a while.

"Wouldn't it be great if we could get our Toozyk trained like that!" exclaimed Alyosha, spitting out the bit of wood on which his rooster had been perched.

"Mh-hm!" responded Mitya, as he, too, took the little stick out of his mouth, examined it carefully, sighed, and threw it away.

Meanwhile, the stage had been occupied by jug-

glers. They juggled with rings, bottles and plates. After that a small, beautiful lady walked a tightrope—the boys held their breath as they watched her, they were so afraid she might fall. She got the biggest yet applause. Alyosha and Mitya clapped so hard that their palms hurt, and they made themselves hoarse with yelling “Bravo!”

Then at last... The man in the dress coat announced that the estimable public would now witness some incredible numbers presented by the wizard of the twentieth century, the famous, the phenomenal KOFO. Nervous people were asked to leave.

“We’re not gonna leave,” yelled Red-Face, “our money’s as good...”

He didn’t finish because something suddenly exploded and white smoke billowed out of the very centre of the stage.

When the smoke cleared everybody saw a pale, tall old man in a top-hat and black cape.

“It’s him,” whispered Mitya.

“Keep quiet,” murmured Alyosha, his eyes riveted to the stage.

Although at first Kofo did do some remarkable tricks, there was nothing scary in them. He took a dozen eggs out of his mouth, lit a match by passing it through the air a few times, emptied three bottles of vodka into one small wine-glass (“A toast to your health, most honourable public”), but the wine-glass stayed just as half-full as it had been.

Everybody clapped, laughed, and shouted “En-core!”

The red-faced man said, over and over again:

"Ain't that something! A real caution!"

Now the conjurer began to invite people from the audience to come on stage. He touched them with his magic wand and pulled his watch, cigars and handkerchieves out of their pockets; then even a pigeon came out of the pocket of a stout man who was smirking in embarrassment. The stout man got scared, the audience laughed uproariously, while Red-Face, suddenly catching on, shouted:

"He's their man! Theirs! He had the pigeon in his pocket!"

Kofo looked calmly up to the gallery and asked the unbelieving spectator to come up on the stage.

"Why not?.. I'm agreeable..." said Red-Face and made resolutely for the stage.

However, the nearer he got, the slower he walked, and then, looking around several times, he stopped altogether. First the gallery, and then the rest of the audience began to encourage him.

"Don't be afraid, please," said the old man.

Red-Face, shaking his head in desperation, ran up to the stage. The conjurer immediately took a pigeon out of the man's pocket, and then lifted his fur hat and another pigeon fluttered out of it.

Red-Face stood absolutely flabbergasted, while the audience laughed so hard that it seemed the entire flimsy structure would collapse.

Red-Face returned to his seat. Alyosha glanced at him and then unexpectedly shouted:

"Please, may I try?"

"Of course you may," said the old man in a rumbling voice.

When Alyosha found himself on the stage Kofo said:

"You will now see a trick with money."

He began to search his pockets, and seemed to have forgotten all about Alyosha. Finally he said:

"Honourable public, my wallet is missing."

The audience began to laugh.

"I'm not joking," said the old man, and, turning to Alyosha, asked: "Young man, perhaps you know where my wallet is?"

"No," said Alyosha, shrugging his shoulders.

"But maybe you have it?"

"N-no," said Alyosha, backing away.

"He took it!" yelled Red-Face from the gallery. "Honest to God—he took it!"

"You're lying!" shouted Alyosha, looking up to the gallery and clenching his fists, but he could see nothing in the darkness.

The audience rocked with laughter.

"He took it, must be him," Red-Face persisted. "He filched a 15-kopeck piece from my pocket yesterday!"

Alyosha flushed angrily.

"You're a lying cur, you are!" he shouted.

A new outburst of laughter deafened Alyosha.

"Silence, please..." said Kofo, lifting his magic wand. He touched Alyosha's pocket with the wand and then drew a shiny black leather wallet out of it.

"I never took it," whispered Alyosha.

"Calm down, young man. You are dealing with a conjurer, not a policeman." He removed a ten-rouble banknote from the wallet and offered it to Alyosha. "Kindly confirm that this is real money."

Alyosha took the note cautiously—never in his life had he held such big money in his hands.

"Yes, it's real," he said and quickly returned the money to the old man.

Now the conjurer extended a pair of scissors to Alyosha, then folded the ten-rouble note several times, holding it high over his head while doing so, to let everybody see. He said to Alyosha: "Cut it."

"How?" whispered Alyosha.

"In half."

Alyosha stood transfixed: he'd never be able to pay for such a business!

"No, I won't," he said.

"Young man, I assure you, in the presence of witnesses, that you will not be held responsible for anything. Go ahead, cut it."

The note rustled as it was snipped by the scissors. A gasp went up in the audience.

Dead silence reigned.

"Cut it once more."

Beads of perspiration glistening on his forehead, Alyosha again cut the banknote with the sharp scissors.

"You fool! What are you doing?!" rang out Mitya's voice.

"Quiet. Please be quiet," said Kofo.

He threw the cut-up note into his top-hat, covered it with a handkerchief, touched the magic wand to it, and asked Alyosha to remove the cloth.

Alyosha obeyed.

"Now turn the hat upside down," ordered the old man.

Alyosha turned the top-hat over and four intact

ten-rouble notes fell out of it.

"Pick them up, please," requested Kofo. "Thank you, young man. You may leave the stage."

In absolute silence Alyosha went up to the gallery. The applause broke out only when he had already reached his place.

The curtain closed, and the man in the dresscoat again came out front.

"Now I consider it my duty," he said very loudly, "to warn nervous people that they'd better leave the hall. The per-for-r-mance co-onti-inues!"

Again the orchestra blared up brassily and the conjurer appeared with the small lady who had walked a tightrope before. She was no longer attired in a short white skirt—she had donned a skin-tight black leotard and black gloves. The stage, too, was draped in black velvet.

Now the really frightening stunts began.

The lady stepped into a coffin and laid herself down; two burly men put the lid over her and lifted the coffin on to a table. Kofo ceremoniously handed them a two-handled saw, touched the magic wand to the lid of the coffin, and the men began to saw.

The audience froze. The only sound was that of the saw as it bit into the wood. When the coffin had been sawed in half and the silence grew unbearable the old man touched his magic wand to the lid.

In the orchestra the drummer struck up a rolling beat that went faster and faster, attaining a frenzied fury. Both halves of the sawed-through coffin lid opened up and, to the music of the entire orchestra, the lady stepped out of the coffin unharmed.

"I thought my heart would bust when those guys were sawing," admitted Mitya.

"You just wait, something still weirder come up, you'll see," answered Alyosha, trying to put a cheerful ring into his voice, but he, too, was pale and dazed.

On the stage preparations were being made for the next number: the coffin, table, and saw were removed and a glittering sabre was handed to Kofo. The lady in the black leotard appeared again and went to the middle of the stage.

The stage lights dimmed. The woman's white face stood out clearly in the semi-darkness, while everything that was draped in black seemed to have merged with the background. Suddenly the light went out altogether for a few seconds; when it came up again there were no visible changes on the stage. The woman's face was just as clear, at her side stood Kofo with the sabre in one hand and the wand in the other.

"Attention, please," said the old man and, lifting his sabre, made a strong, swift slash with it a bit lower than the head.

The sound of a falling body was heard. Somebody in the audience shrieked. Alyosha closed his eyes for a moment; when he opened them he saw that the lady's head was in its former place—it seemed to be floating in the air. Moreover, the lady suddenly smiled.

Kofo put his hand, palm up, under the head and,

Kofo put his hand, palm up, under the head and, thus holding it, walked a few steps to the left and then to the right and returned to his former place.

Alyosha and Mitya were the last to leave. They walked as if in a haze.



thus holding it, walked a few steps to the left and then to the right and returned to his former place.

Once more the light went out and came on. At first it was very weak, but you could still make out the head and the conjurer.

Again the old man said, in an impressive manner: "Attention, please," and touched the head with his wand.

The drumsticks began their staccato beat, going faster and faster. The spectators felt icy quivers go down their spines with the sound. The light became brighter and brighter, spotlights flooded the stage and everybody saw the small, beautiful lady. She stepped forward and bowed.

The old man and the lady were called out many times—they came out, holding hands and bowing. The lady smiled and wafted kisses to the audience, while Kofo's face retained its ceremonial impenetrability.

When everybody's palms were sore from clapping and their voices hoarse the man in the dress coat came out again and announced that the performance was over.

The estimable public, pressing and pushing, flowed to the exit. Alyosha and Mitya were the last to leave. They walked as if in a haze. How sorry it made them to have to leave this wonderland!

"If we had one like it, hey?" said Alyosha.

"Like what?"

"Like that wand. We'd do wonders, you'n'me..."

"Uhuh, we would," agreed Mitya.

"What if we asked him for it? He wouldn't give it up, though."

"He wouldn't," echoed Mitya. "Maybe he keeps it somewhere here. Let's hide ourselves and find it when everybody leaves."

"Eh, d'you take him for a fool? I guess he keeps that wand in an ironbound chest at home, and hides the chest down in the cellar. It's locked with a heavy padlock, and a padlock twice as heavy is hung on the cellar door. Get that?"

Mitya nodded and, thinking it over, said:

"You ask him anyhow, Alyosha. Didn't you help him cut the money up?"

"At first I was awfully afraid," admitted Alyosha.

"See—he remembers you. Cross my heart—he does!"

As they stepped over the threshold of the show-booth the door was immediately locked behind them, with the clang of an iron latch.

It was already dark outside. The snow was still falling.

A cold wind snaked into the boys' sleeves and the holes in their felt boots. They shivered with cold, but would not leave the show-booth. Could it be that they would never again see the magic wand that could do anything? Take a rouble—snip-snap with the scissors, touch it with the wand, and—presto!—instead of one you have four roubles.

"Mitya, if you had a rouble, what would you do with it?"

"A rouble?! Oh, my!.. I'd..." Mitya could barely catch his breath.

"I'd buy all kinds of medicines," said Alyosha in a low voice. "Our Mum's awfully sick. She needs

medicines. But where's the money to come from?" He paused for a moment. "And I'd buy a whole tenkopeck's worth of red roosters," he added with a sigh.

By this time Mitya had recovered.

"I'd buy a new pair of felt boots first thing," he said. "I wouldn't mind some pigeons, too, and also..." he even puckered up his eyes.

"Also this and also that!" exclaimed Alyosha. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind a new hat into the bargain—all for a rouble!"

"Why, wouldn't a rouble be enough?"

"Course it wouldn't."

The boys grew silent. What was the use of talking—they had no rouble anyhow.

There was nobody near the show-booth any longer. It was strange to see this noisy place become so dead and silent. The wind was getting stronger and stronger, and this standing and waiting for the old man was growing intolerable.

A horse-drawn cab drove up to the booth. The cabman put down his reins, rolled himself a stogie, and then asked:

"Well, lads, you're freezing, aren't you?"

Alyosha wanted to make some cheeky retort, but noticed that somebody was hurrying to the cab. It was just an ordinary person—a man in an overcoat with a cheap fur collar, a fur hat with ear-flaps, and high boots. He was carrying a small handbag. But Alyosha gazed at him as if he were a wonder of wonders.

"It's Kofo," he whispered to Mitya when the man came nearer.

"Uhuh!" responded Mitya.

Alyosha was dismayed: he had thought that Kofo would come out in a splendid fur coat and sable hat, would have his own coach and coachman, would get in and—phew, away he would go, like the wind, leaving swirls of snow behind him! But look at this: a shabby cab-driver, and the magician himself didn't look much better. It was hard to believe that such a one could own a magic wand. Maybe it was all a dream? But how could everybody have the same dream? While Alyosha was thinking how to ask the old man about the wand Mitya suddenly blurted out:

"Mister, where's your magic wand?"

"My what?" asked the old man in surprise. He was already preparing to get into the cab.

"Your magic wand."

"O-oh-h!.." drawled Kofo, as if recalling something. "What do you want it for?"

Mitya wanted to explain about the felt boots and the pigeons, but was overcome by bashfulness. Alyosha, too, instead of explaining it all clearly—his sick mother and the medicines, merely muttered:

"We need it."

"You queer kids," laughed the old man. "My dear funny boys! Here, take it if you need it so badly!" and with these words he extended the "magic wand" to them.

Mitya diffidently took it.

"For both of us!" Alyosha jumped forward.

"Funny kids," said Kofo again. He climbed into the cab and told the cabby: "Let's go—to Arbat Street."

"Giddap!" The cabby brandished his whip and the horse moved forward unwillingly.

ROASTED SUNFLOWER SEEDS

The blustering, rollicking snowstorms and blizzards were over, the snow and ice had thawed with the coming of spring, the noisy chatter of the rooks and jackdaws had also ended, and again summer dust whirled along the Moscow streets, aroused by the wind, by cab wheels, or just by the fluttering wings of boisterous roosters.

Alyosha loved the summer. You could run around barefoot as much as you liked. No comparison with the winter when you had to stop up the holes in your felt boots with rags.

The magic wand had been of no help to Alyosha. It brought the boys neither medicines nor new felt boots. Either Kofo gave them the wrong wand, or the wand itself had lost its magic. It was of no use whatsoever. Alyosha and Mitya fiddled around with it and then threw it away. Where was it now? Alyosha didn't know—nor care. He had enough on his mind without it.

Alyosha poured a glassful of sunflower seeds into the pocket of a passerby and again cried out:

"Roasted sunflower seeds! Who wants sunflower seeds!.." adding, in an undertone, "I wish they'd all go to blazes, curse 'em! I'm sick and tired of it all."

The sun was burning brightly, it was awfully hot in the street; but Alyosha had to stay put near a tavern without daring to move even a step away from it. How fine it would be to sit on the river-bank now with a fishing rod. How nice it was there—a breeze blowing through the shrubs, blue-backed dragonflies flying over

the river, and if you got too hot—you could dive right into the water! Yes, but he had to stick here.

"Sunflower seeds!.. Buy sunflower seeds!"

Oh, today is a bad day. No luck. Yell your head off—no customers.

Lukerya had settled herself on the opposite side of the street. She also had a fat bag of sunflower seeds at her side.

"Who wants sunflower seeds? Roasted, su-unflower se-eds! Roasted!" She cried out the same words.

Alyosha felt sick just from hearing these words: Lukerya shouted in a high, shrill voice trailing off into a wail.

Still, he threw frequent glances at her, expecting her to shout: "Alyosha, let's go home!" However, even though no customers appeared, Lukerya apparently did not think of leaving. "She's found herself a cool spot in the shade," thought Alyosha, "but she stuck me out here to roast in the heat. If I could just drop it all and go down to the river!"

But he knew that he couldn't do this. His mother had asked him to go with Lukerya. "Perhaps you'll earn a ten-kopeck piece." And even if she hadn't asked him to go... Alyosha understood quite well that his mother was ill and that his sister Lena worked all day long at the factory and got next to nothing. So how were they to eat? Besides Alyosha, there were other mouths to feed—his two younger sisters. There wasn't always enough money for bread, let alone medicine.

So that was why he went out with Lukerya to sell sunflower seeds.

Lukerya is awfully stingy. For five glassfuls of seeds

he sells she gives him one kopeck. But what is one to do—the sunflower seeds are hers. Rather, they aren't hers, but her niece Dusya's who comes visiting from the village. Dusya herself is afraid to go out selling her seeds, she is afraid of everything in Moscow: of the jostling crowd near the railway station (might steal something from her!), of the streetcars (might run her over!), and of the moustached policemen (might take her in for something or other).

So Dusya had made an agreement with Lukerya that the latter was to sell the sunflower seeds, but how they fixed up about the money Alyosha didn't know. It was none of his business. His business was to sell as much as he could, the more he sold, the more would his earnings be. Only—could you call this earnings? Enough to make a cat laugh!

At first Lukerya went out by herself to peddle the sunflower seeds. But she found it unhandy to drag two sacks from place to place. Besides, trade was livelier when there were two hawkers in different places. So Lukerya came to the Kuznetsovs for assistance.

Her calculations were correct: her neighbours were a large family, they were poor and always hungry. To make a long story short—Alyosha was sent out with Lukerya without much ado.

At first Alyosha was even glad: just stand in one place and split as many sunflower seeds as you like. But Lukerya warned him at once:

"Watch out, kid! Make free with the seeds—I'll kick you out."

She didn't let Alyosha get far from her, watching him and snooping all the time.

Right now, too, she was watching him to see whether Alyosha took any seeds for himself out of the sack, listening to hear whether he was hawking loud enough, counting how many glassfuls he'd sold.

"Roasted sunflower seeds!.. Buy sunflower seeds!"

Finally two customers approached.

One of them was a tall boy of about fourteen, with a small head on a skinny neck, the other one, with dark hair and shifty eyes, was about two years younger, Alyosha's age.

"How much are they?" asked the tall one, taking a few seeds from the sack and throwing them into his mouth.

"How much are they?" echoed the dark-haired one and also reached his hand out to the sack, but the tall one gave him a ringing flick on the nose.

The dark-haired kid stepped back.

"A kopeck a glassful," said Alyosha. "Are you buying?"

"Pour 'em in here," said the tall one, pulling open one of the other boy's pockets.

"How much?"

"As much as'll go in."

Alyosha poured three glassfuls in, filling the pocket up.

"Now you c'n have yourself a pleasant day," said the dark-haired boy, retreating about ten steps and making faces.

"What about the money?" Alyosha was a bit confused, but he immediately caught the tall boy by a sleeve. "Pay up!"

The boy swiftly threw off Alyosha's hand. "You



gone crazy, or what? I don't know him at all!" he said, his eyes roving insolently over Alyosha's face. "You put 'em in his pocket yourself, you get 'em back yourself!"

Alyosha made a dash towards the dark-haired one, but the boy was a good runner. Several times he let Alyosha get close, but when Alyosha, breathing hard, exhausted, stretched out a hand to catch him the sneak-thief renewed his speed, leaving Alyosha in the lurch.

At the end of the street Alyosha stopped. A terrible surmise suddenly struck his mind: "The sack—oh, the sack!..."

Turning back, Alyosha saw the tall boy running away with the sack. Lukerya, looking like a gigantic black hen, her skirts pulled up, was ambling after him, her white legs twinkling in the sunlight.

"Stop, infidel!.. Stop! Help!.. A hold-up! Help!" cried Lukerya at the top of her voice.

The street was empty. Only a drunk, embracing a puny sapling, followed her with a vacant look.

"Stop, thief!.. Stop him!" wailed Lukerya. She could no longer run and only stretched out her hand in the direction of the thief.

The thief, meanwhile, ran lightly, never turning his head to glance back; he dived into an arch and was gone.

Alyosha stood still, not knowing where to go.

Alyosha made a dash towards the dark-haired one, but the boy was a good runner.

Turning back, Alyosha saw the tall boy running away with the sack.

Everything around him had gone grey, soundless and lifeless. Just as if the sun no longer shone, as if no roosters crowed in the courtyards and no sparrows bathed in the roadside dust.

MIKHEI MIKHEYEVICH* AND HIS COOKIES

After that even Lukerya no longer took Alyosha along. His mother was pretty upset at first:

"The child was in business, earning his piece of bread. And now what?"

"We'll manage," Lena would say. "At the factory they've promised to give me a raise. Honest to God, they have."

However, Alyosha understood that his sister merely wanted to make their mother's mind easier. How many times he'd already heard about that raise.

It's easy to say "We'll manage." But on what? While their father was still alive they managed somehow. Father was a joiner. He'd make a cart for this person, a table for that one. Although his health was poor, he did earn a bit.

And now, on top of everything, the sunflower-seed business...

Lena's workmate helped them. Her brother Fyodor was an apprentice in a shoemaker's shop. This Fyodor

* The polite form of address to an adult in Russian is to call a person by his name and patronymic, which is his father's name with the ending *ovich*, *evich* or *ich* for a man and *ovna* for a woman. Mikhei Mikheyevich means Mikhei, son of Mikhei; Anna Ivanovna means Anna, daughter of Ivan.—Tr.

had promised to talk his master into taking on Alyosha as a pupil.

"Well, Alyosha," said his mother happily, "you try hard, mind your master. When you learn to cobble you'll be somebody, you'll want for nothing."

An agreement was reached with the owner of the shop, Mikhei Mikheyevich, that Alyosha would be apprenticed to him for five years.

"Tell him to behave properly and never talk back. If he shirks any job I give him—why, then I'll let him go to all four winds! I've no use for spongers," Mikhei Mikheyevich said to Lena at the end of their talk.

When Lena got home she said that Alyosha would have a strict master, and he wasn't to expect any indulgences.

"That's all right," said the mother, smiling at her son. "Alyosha is a diligent boy. Isn't that so, son?"

"Yeah, sure," nodded Alyosha.

He wasn't too keen on leaving home, but he was very sorry for his mother—she smiled in such a forlorn, ingratiating manner.

"I'll make boots for all of you," he said blithely, in order to cheer his mother up. "You'll see!" Alyosha flashed a glance at Lena—she always caught his meaning at once. Now she suddenly went up to him, put a hand on his head and said, in a low voice:

"I only hope they won't beat you there..."

Lena was nine years older than Alyosha and she had a motherly feeling for him. She loved him more than all the rest and pampered him as well as she could.

Mikhei Mikheyevich's shoe-shop was three streets away, not far from the Bryansk railway terminal.

The house was big and wide, but it had only one storey. In the courtyard, which was enclosed by a high fence, stood several sheds and some sort of auxiliary structures.

Alyosha felt miserable as soon as the heavy wicket had shut squeakily behind him and he found himself in the yard.

He had imagined his master would be a tall man in creaking, shiny boots and a black jacket from beneath which a gold watch-chain hung.

Mikhei Mikheyevich gave them a cool welcome.

"Oh, so you've come," he said, giving Alyosha a quick look and taking a bite of the cucumber he was holding.

No, this was not at all like what Alyosha had imagined. This was an altogether different person. It was hard to believe he was the master. He spoke in a high, womanish voice, sitting barefoot, a faded shirt falling over his trousers, belted in with a piece of string. His hair was tousled and his face unshaven.

"Good afternoon," said Alyosha, taking off his cap and looking out of the corner of his eye at his sister, as if asking whether he was doing as she had taught him.

"Good afternoon, Mikhei Mikheyevich," said Lena. "I've brought you my brother, Alyosha."

The master again crunched a bite of cucumber and drawled:

"Not too strong, I see, not too strong."

"Oh, but I am strong, Mikhei Mikheyevich," blurted Alyosha. "It's just my looks. If you tell me to, I

c'n take on two at once. In our street I..."

"You keep your mouth shut when you aren't asked to talk," interrupted the master. "See how talkative he is! You've not come here to chatter. Talkers aren't fed nowadays."

Alyosha bowed his head. He wanted to do what was best, but see how it turned out!

"All right," said Mikhei Mikheyevich, not looking at anybody. "Go to the kitchen."

"They'll give me something to eat now," thought Alyosha.

However, in the kitchen he was made to peel potatoes, then he washed the dishes, chopped wood, took out the garbage pails, and ran to the well at the end of the street for water.

The master's wife, a fat, frowzy woman, roamed sleepily through the house, watching Alyosha. Her name was Marya Petrovna.

At times she would bring a stool, place an old, greasy little pillow on it, and sit down, cupping her chin with a hand, yawning, shutting her eyes blissfully as she crossed her mouth, and watched and watched and watched.

After several hours of such work Alyosha could barely stand on his feet.

When he sat down for a moment to get his breath back, the mistress asked:

"Tired, are you?"

"Yes, I'm tired," admitted Alyosha.

The mistress yawned, screening her mouth with a hand, and said:

"Well, dearie, you're not going to eat our bread for nothing."



Alyosha swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

"Look now, you scour that there pan meanwhile. It's gotten sort of green, hasn't it?"

"Yes."

"So that's how it is, dearie. Get to work."

Alyosha took the washing basket and went out.

...It was evening before he was given some food.

A rain was hammering on the roof.

Alyosha curled up, shivering with cold. How unwilling he was to get up! There was nothing worse than autumn. He wished the winter would come soon. Look at that—rain falling and falling, as if it was poured out of a pail. Mud is knee-deep. How is one to walk outside? Too cold to go barefoot, and shoes aren't much better, with a hole atop a hole in them. But if you leave them inside the house, then later, after you get back from the street, you can warm your feet up a bit in them. Eh, and when are they going to begin to teach him? He'd surely manage to fix his shoes then.

Every day started out this way. And every day he had one and the same chores to do: potatoes, dishes, wood, garbage... The master never even said a thing about teaching Alyosha.

Alyosha got dressed. He slept in the corridor, near

At times she would bring a stool ... and sit down, cupping her chin with a hand, yawning, shutting her eyes blissfully as she crossed her mouth, and watched and watched and watched.

In the workshop he came face to face with the master.

the kitchen. He looked out of the window. It was still pitch-dark outside. You could barely make out the shape of the shed. "By the time I tidy up the place it'll be light," he thought and went to wash his face and hands.

As he splashed some water on his face he saw that there was nothing left in the pail. He looked into another pail, and remembered that the old lady had ordered him to wash the floors in the kitchen and corridors as soon as he got up. Nowadays Marya Petrovna woke up late, having seen that there was no need to watch over Alyosha when he worked. He did everything very thoroughly and knew just how things should be done.

Having lit the fire in the oven Alyosha put a kettle of potatoes to boil and started on the floors. He decided to go for the water a bit later, since it was still so dark that he was afraid of falling into a puddle.

When he finished the floors Alyosha looked out of the window again. It was still dark, although the puddles stood out on the black ground like grey patchwork.

Taking the pails, Alyosha went out onto the stoop.

Here and there the first early passers-by could be seen. They were all going to work. Alyosha envied them: factories and workshops awaited them, with plenty of noise in them and lots of people. Alyosha liked to be among people. At the shoemaker's he felt as if he were all alone in the house. Really, with whom could he talk? Surely, not with Marya Petrovna who did nothing but sit on her pillowed stool, sighing and crossing her mouth. The workshop was small. There

were only two cobblers in it, the master himself and his apprentice Fyodor who had gotten the job for Alyosha. Alyosha saw him very seldom. Fyodor lived here, in this house, in a tiny room. He did almost all the work alone. Mikhei Mikheyevich was often drunk, not coming to his senses for a long time. He cursed and swore in his womanish voice, but very loudly, you could hear him all over the place; his hands were shaking so much that he kept dropping everything...

"Lyosha! Hi, Lyosha!"

Alyosha started. He had just pulled his second full pail out of the well.

Could it be Mitya? He turned—of course it was!

"Mitya!" he shouted joyfully. "Where'd you spring from?"

They hadn't seen each other for a long time. The master did not permit Alyosha to visit his home. "I won't have you idling about," he said.

So now the friends met.

"I knew that you were at the cobbler's," said Mitya.

"So why didn't you come to see me?" exclaimed Alyosha.

"I wanted to, but your mother told me that your master was very cross-tempered, so I didn't dare come. He might start fighting."

"Not on your life! He gave me a cookie yesterday," fibbed Alyosha, not knowing why he did so. "'Here,' he said, 'eat this, you've scrubbed the floors very well.'"

"Floors? What floors?"

"Don't you know? The floors in the house, of course."

"But I heard you'd been taken on as an apprentice!"

Alyosha looked obliquely at his pails. But it was already too late to retreat. Therefore he said:

"Course, an apprentice. But the mistress asked me to scrub the floors. Says she's got a crick in her back. Well, why not oblige her?.. It's not such a hard job, is it?" and he made haste to change the subject. "Where are you going—far?"

"Know what? I work now, too, Lyosha."

"You do?"

"Yes, I do. At the railway station, in the buffet, together with my Mum."

Work in a buffet—that, of course, sounded fine. Only Mitya wasn't telling Alyosha everything, either. To tell the truth, his work was not in the buffet itself, but in the service room where his mother was a dishwasher. She had cut her finger with a knife, and the wound didn't heal for a long time; it became difficult for her to manage the dishwashing, so Mitya helped her. He was given some scraps of food there, so he was satisfied.

Of course, Mitya didn't think such details were worth telling Alyosha about. He worked in the buffet—that was enough—the rest was simply unimportant.

However, Alyosha was interested in an altogether different thing.

"How long since you saw Seryoga?" he asked.

"On Sunday."

"Did he let you drive his pigeons?"

"Nope, he didn't."

"Didn't have the three kopecks?" sympathised Alyosha.

"Happens, I did. Saved up for two weeks. But Seryoga wouldn't let me drive his pigeons because somebody'd lured away a pair of his tumblers—he was that mad, no talking to him!"

Alyosha wasn't overfond of Seryoga, but he felt sorry for the tumbler pigeons, too. Many were the times he'd admired them (that you could do without paying any three kopecks), and when he was lucky enough to save up this miserable fee Alyosha would rush to Seryoga, forgetting about everything else. But this didn't happen too often. He mostly just watched the pigeons from a distance.

"Who pinched them?"

"They say—Shimakha, but who knows."

"Shimakha, sure enough," confirmed Alyosha. "Who else would want to get into trouble with Seryoga!"

Shimakha lived in the Khamovniki area, but all the pigeon-drivers of Moscow knew of him.

Alyosha suddenly remembered how easily Kofo had taken pigeons out of spectators' pockets in the show-booth. It had seemed then that it was all owing to the wand. "If we had a magic wand," Alyosha and Mitya had dreamed. Oh, no, the wand worked only in the show-booth. How difficult it was to believe that this was so, but it was.

"Mitya, d'you remember Kofo?"

"Sure I do."

"Remember how he pulled out those pigeons?"

"Aha... And how they sawed the coffin..."

"And then how he cut off her head with his sabre, huh?"

Reminiscences tumbled out one after another.

The boys were brought back to earth only when a passer-by said angrily:

"Hey, you—let me pass. Wagging your tongues by the well like old gossips."

The boys stopped their conversation in the middle of a sentence.

"I've got to run to the station," Mitya said, "you come over when you can."

"I'll come," said Alyosha lifting his pails. "Goodbye."

In the workshop he came face to face with the master.

"Where've you been loafing, eh?!" Mikhei Mikheyevich cried, grasping Alyosha by his shirt-collar. A button sprang from it and rolled on the floor. Water splashed out of the pails.

"I went for water, Mikhei Mikheyevich."

"For water?" repeated the master; and suddenly slapped Alyosha's face hard, with all his might. "For water?" And slapped him again. "It's death you should be sent for, nothing else!" Another blow. "Go to Marya Petrovna."

Marya Petrovna was sitting on her soft stool, shaking her head and sighing:

"So that's the kind of worker you are," she uttered at last.

Alyosha stood, hanging his head and saying nothing.

"So you don't care a fig for your master's property, eh?"

"What property?"

"How do you like that! And the potatoes in the pot—who let them burn up?.. Nothing to say? And you've got no respect for your master, no, you haven't! Mikhei Mikheyevich went to wash up—and there was no water. You should've left some. So that's how it is, dearie. Not nice at all."

"Drop dead," thought Alyosha, standing silent as before."

"Well, get going. I've put a barrel out in the yard. Scrub it out properly. We're going to put up sauerkraut for the winter in it."

Alyosha scrubbed the dust and mold from the sides of the barrel, but in his mind's eye he still saw Mikhei Mikheyevich. He was saying, over and over again: "For water?!" And again Alyosha felt the slap he had received.

RUNAWAY

"Home! I want to go home as fast as I can!" This thought suppressed all others. It urged and sped Alyosha on, making him run. Now only one turn was left. The smithy was around the corner, then an empty lot, a dairy shop, and then his house.

His heart was pounding madly. He was feverishly hot, not from running—but because a hot wave was rising somewhere inside and spreading throughout his entire body.

Oh, he couldn't have managed to run away from Mikhei Mikheyevich if not for a lucky circumstance. His master had sent him to a customer's home with a

pair of mended boots. Usually the customers all came to the shop themselves. This one, a short man with a big, hooked nose and piercing eyes, had also brought his boots to the shop himself, and called for them several days later. They didn't require much mending. However, Mikhei Mikheyevich had gone on a drinking spree, while his apprentice Fyodor didn't know about this pair of boots, so he told the customer to come again tomorrow. But on the next day the same thing happened. Besides, Fyodor, who hadn't seen the big-nosed man's boots at all, began to doubt whether he had brought them to the shop at all.

"You, mister, must've had a bit too much and swapped your boots for a drink in the pub, I think."

At this the customer began to curse loudly and threaten to call the police. Hearing this, Mikhei Mikheyevich himself appeared.

"Now don't you threaten us with the police. You're a thief and a bum yourself," he said, staggering drunkenly.

At this the big-nosed client got red in the face, his whole body quivering with indignation.

"Now, right this moment ... right now I'll go to the police station!" he cried, rushing to the door.

But Fyodor blocked his way.

"Dear sir, it's all a mistake. Your boots are ready. You've paid up already, haven't you?" said Fyodor, winking at the big-nosed man.

The latter was pretty angry, but he decided that it would be better to overlook the scandal. Only tipsy Mikhei Mikheyevich wouldn't calm down.

"Let him get out and go to the police station!" he

shouted, his voice rising to a screech. "My own brother-in-law is a policeman! I'll tell my brother-in-law—he'll show you, you bum..."

Mikhei Mikheyevich picked up a hammer. The customer backed to the door.

"Just a moment," Fyodor winked again at him and caught the master's arm.

"Leggo!" shouted Mikhei Mikheyevich, "you leggo o'me, just let me pretty up his mug!"

However, Fyodor held on firmly. After several attempts to free himself, Mikhei Mikheyevich quietened down and Fyodor led him away to the other room.

"Mikhei Mikheyevich," he said to the master, "what good will it do us to get mixed up with the police? If he brings a policeman over it'll come out pretty dear."

"I don't give a hoot, I don't," mumbled Mikhei Mikheyevich. "We'll sole the policeman's boots—and be done with it! What else would he want?"

"So he'll get into the habit, Mikhei Mikheyevich, and he'll bring another one along. We'll have to cobble for the entire police force! It'll cost us a pretty penny, Mikhei Mikheyevich, mind my word."

Now it dawned on the master that Fyodor was right. Let him be the nosy guy.

"I'll sole his boots—they'll be better'n new, and let Alyosha deliver them to his house," proposed Fyodor.

So it was decided. The client left his address and explained how to get there, and he was promised that the boots would be brought to him on that same day. As soon as the big-nosed man had left, Fyodor sat down to work on the boots. When they were ready

Alyosha was summoned and bidden to deliver them into the client's own hands. Should he be away from home Alyosha was to wait until he returned, and he was not to give the boots to anyone else—relatives or neighbours—otherwise that good-for-nothing, who was capable of anything, would say that he knew of no boots, that he hadn't received them, and then what would happen?

Alyosha was in luck: Big-Nose was at home; Alyosha handed over the boots and turned his footsteps back to the workshop.

Suddenly a bold idea hit him; why shouldn't he run away from Mikhei Mikheyevich? Really, why not? Didn't he lead a dog's life?.. No, the master's dog fared better than Alyosha did. And the loads of household work they made him do, but taught him nothing of cobbling! If they only knew at home, they'd never have apprenticed him to such a teacher. He just had to run away. To run away! Right now was a convenient opportunity to do so.

Here was the house. The door creaked familiarly, smells he had been used to since early childhood assailed him—burnt carpenter's glue, tar, sauerkraut. His mother raised her hands in surprise: "Alyosha, darling! What joy!"

She left the tub in which she was washing clothes, hurriedly wiping her hands on her apron.

Alyosha hugged his mother, while she patted him with her blanched, sud-steamed palms.

"Well, let's sit down," said the mother, seating herself on a bench. "For how long did Mikhei Mikheyevich let you off?"

The younger children looked down from the top of the Russian oven.

"Alyosha, Lyosha is here!"

"Alyosha..."

They stretched their hands out to him, their little heads hanging over the edge of the oven.

The mother suddenly looked significantly at Alyosha and beckoned him to come with her into the farthest corner of the room, where she whispered into his ear:

"Alyosha, I told them," she nodded towards the oven, "that you would soon come and bring them a nice treat. Here, you take this, break it in half for them, otherwise they'll set up a wail."

She pushed a spice cooky into his hand; it was small and stale. Alyosha tried to break it but couldn't. It was too hard.

"Here, give it to me," whispered the mother.

She took a knife, placed its sharp edge over the cooky and hit the blade sharply a few times. The cooky broke in two.

"Here," she said, extending both halves to Alyosha, but then paused, reconsidering. She broke a tiny piece off each half: "This is for you."

Alyosha put all the pieces into his pocket and climbed up to the oven top to join his sisters.

The little girls were waiting for him.

"Alyosha, Alyosha..." they repeated, stroking his face.

He gave each little sister a piece of cooky. They began to lick them as if they were sugar candies, holding the pieces in their clenched fists. A lick—a



look, a lick and another look.

Relentlessly, the pieces got smaller and smaller, notwithstanding such restrained treatment.

How familiar this was to Alyosha! He'd better not touch the crumbs in his pocket at all. The knowledge that they were there should suffice.

But how could one say: "Just hold on a bit, kids, don't suck, have a little patience. There'll soon be nothing left of your cooky."

The cookies soon came to an end. The children looked into their empty hands, licked their palms. How fast it was all over! But perhaps Alyosha had some more treats hidden? The little girls stopped licking their palms and looked hopefully at their brother.

Their eyes made Alyosha feel like hiding. But where was he to hide—? He could turn away, but he would still see them. Alyosha took the two remaining bits out of his pocket—the ones his mother had chipped off for him. The little sisters licked them up so quickly that they didn't even get a good look at them.

"Mom, is there anything around the house for me to do?" asked Alyosha.

She smiled gratefully.

"Oh, Lyosha, take a rest, you have enough work to do at Mikhei Mikheyevich's place."

"But, Mum, you know, I..." and he couldn't bring himself to say that he'd run away from his master.

His mother was smiling, her face all wrinkled up. Alyosha understood that his mother was proud of him,

Alyosha put all the pieces into his pocket and climbed up to the oven top to join his sisters.

and this made his wish to help her still stronger.

"Mummy, maybe I'll fetch some water?" he asked.

"Just sit with me a while. Tell me how you live there."

"What's there to tell!" Alyosha brushed off her question.

"Why don't you tell me about what you're learning," smiled the mother.

"Learning?" Alyosha was suddenly overcome by bitterness. Tears welling up in his eyes, he said, unexpectedly for himself: "He beats me, Mom..."

"Who?" asked the mother. "Mikhei Mikheyevich?" Then she understood that this was an unnecessary question. "How is this? I'll tell him... I'll talk to him... He won't do it anymore... This is no good!" She stopped, looked away into the corner of the room, and sighing deeply, said: "He who learns always gets beaten—it was always so. Only I'll tell Mikhei Mikheyevich not to beat you anymore."

"He who learns..." repeated Alyosha after his mother, and became silent.

Should he tell her everything? Mummy would be too upset. Should he say nothing? Why, they'd ask, did you run away? "He who learns always gets beaten—it was always so."

"I'll tell Lena, she'll understand," decided Alyosha.

"Ma, I'm hungry," came a voice from the oven top.

"Me, too, Ma," added the other little sister.

"You can never have enough for them," complained the mother to Alyosha and raised her voice: "Stop it! When Lena gets home we'll all eat together."

Alyosha was very familiar with this simple ruse. His

mother was stretching the time. If she fed the children now they would soon ask for more. Really, where was so much to come from?

"Did Lena get her raise?"

"Still promising her one," answered the mother, returning to her washtub.

The little girls hung their heads out over the edge of the stove.

"Mom, give me something to eat..."

"Give me some bread..."

"I'll be going, Mama," said Alyosha. "I've got to get back to Mikhei Mikheyevich."

"Go, dear, go, Alyosha."

She saw him out to the stoop.

"I'll talk to Mikhei Mikheyevich, honest to goodness I will."

Alyosha slowly wended his way to the shoemaker's place.

"The only things I'll hear there again will be 'bring this', 'get that', or 'run there'. Again Mikhei Mikheyevich'll goggle his eyes and yell at me. As soon as I get back he'll shout: 'Where've you been?' I'll tell him Big-Nose wasn't at home and I waited a long time for him."

FYODOR THE APPRENTICE, OR A VIPER IN THE BOSOM

When winter came and the earth was frost-bound Alyosha's mother brought him his old *valenki*—his thick felt boots. Those very same boots, the ones with the holes in them.

She had been to the shop several times before, had spoken with Mikhei Mikheyevich who had shouted angrily. She always left with reddened eyes. Such visits promised no changes for the better in Alyosha's life.

Alyosha was allowed into the "reception room"—the small shop in which the master and Fyodor both worked and where they received their clients—only when it had to be cleaned and tidied up. In his eyes this was a special world and he always felt a thrill when he entered it. How fine it all looked: shelves with shoes and boots on them, boxes in which the instruments were kept, and the low benches at which the master and his apprentice sat. The very air of the room had a pleasant tang—it smelled of leather, varnish, paint.

Once, as he was cleaning up in the reception room, Alyosha picked up several bits of thick felt. He wanted to throw them into the rubbish pail into which he always dumped all the waste left on the floor after the cobbler's had finished work, but he suddenly thought of his felt boots. These pieces would be just enough to patch the holes in them. What if he tried to do it?

Alyosha ran for his *valenki*, seated himself on a low chair and started cutting out a patch of felt.

He had a vision of himself as a real shoemaker to whom everybody came to order new boots and addressed respectfully by his name and patronymic. And his fame as the best cobbler would spread far and wide. Now a whole noisy crowd of customers appeared in his vision, all arguing, pushing, each one wanting to shake his hand first. And he says to them: "My dear sirs, I cannot accept all your orders at once, seeing as I'm up to my neck in work." But the clients wouldn't

calm down. "We don't want anybody but you, they say, to make our boots. We're willing to wait even a whole year. You'll never find such another shoemaker in the whole wide..."

In back of him the door creaked and somebody stepped into the reception room. Alyosha hunched up his shoulders. How awful it was to wait for a blow from behind one's back. Where would it land? And when? Now ... another moment ... another...

Alyosha turned his head. Fyodor stood in the doorway.

"Why are you trembling like an aspen leaf?" Fyodor made a few steps, took Alyosha's boot out of his hands. "Mhm, boy, it's no better than a sieve, this boot of yours."

In silence Alyosha put the knife and the piece of felt on the bench. Then he said:

"That's all I've got."

"Don't worry," said Fyodor, turning the second boot around in his hands. "We'll manage somehow." And he threw both boots, one after the other, into the box where the shoes and boots of customers were kept.

Alyosha made a rush for the box, but Fyodor stopped him:

"Let them be."

"But Mikhei Mikheyevich..."

"That's none of your business. He who fears wolves should never go into the woods, they say."

On the following evening Fyodor returned Alyosha's *valenki*. They were pock-marked with patches and had brand-new soles.

"Wear them in good health," said Fyodor, "and tell

Mikhei Mikheyevich that it's high time you started learning. Don't be afraid. He'll begin to yell, but you be firm and say your say over and over again—see what I mean?"

Alyosha could not muster up enough courage to speak to Mikhei Mikheyevich.

However, one day, as he finished kindling a fire in the samovar, Alyosha glanced at Marya Petrovna who was dozing nearby, and suddenly blurted:

"When am I going to learn something?" Alyosha felt a flash of assurance.

"Learn what, huh?"

"What ... how to cobble, that's what!"

The old woman threw up her hands. An alarmed look appeared on her round face.

"So that's the sort of boy you are! We feed you, and you... I'll have to complain to Mikhei Mikheyevich about this." She got up heavily and shuffled away along the cluttered corridor in her worn slippers.

Upon returning Marya Petrovna looked angrily at Alyosha and said:

"Get along with you. Himself's calling."

Alyosha went hot and cold with emotion. He paused a while, and then set off quickly for the reception room.

Both the master and Fyodor were there. The latter looked cheerfully at Alyosha, and winked: don't you be afraid, he meant.

But Mikhei Mikheyevich was in a grim mood.

"So here you are, pupil-boy!" he exclaimed. "Go

stand by Fyodor over there. Look and see what he does. Learn..." Rising from his seat he walked angrily to the door.

"Been tossing it down since morning," nodded Fyodor when Mikhei Mikheyevich had left the room. "O blazes with him, we'll manage by ourselves!"

That day marked the beginning of Alyosha's apprenticeship. Soon he could already twist and wax the ends of the stout thread used for sewing leather. He learnt how to sharpen the cobbler's knives and awls, how to cook glue, how to chop tiny wooden nails from a block of birch-wood.

"When will I begin to cobble?" he asked Fyodor from time to time.

"Just have patience, Moscow wasn't built all at once either."

"I could do it, Uncle Fedya, cross my heart I could!" insisted Alyosha.

The master was very strict in his demands. Whenever Alyosha made the slightest mistake he yelled in anger: "You accursed leech! Bloodsucker, a burden on my shoulders!"—and blows rained on Alyosha. The household chores were just as numerous—Alyosha barely had time to breathe.

But when Alyosha and Fyodor were left alone the apprentice would teach Alyosha how to use an awl and hammer, how to cut leather.

Now Alyosha understood that almost all the work in the shop was done by Fyodor alone: he took in the orders from clients, he both mended old shoes and boots and sewed new ones, and he was also the one who went for the materials they needed for their work.

Mikhei Mikheyevich scolded him, as he did everybody else, but he knew Fyodor's worth.

"He's worth his weight in gold, the villain," he was wont to say.

Alyosha liked Fyodor more and more. He watched with admiration as the apprentice skilfully nailed down a sole with little wooden pegs he held between his lips, taking them out one by one, pressing the peg to the sole and swiftly—bang—hammering it in with one blow.

"Will I really be able to do that?" thought Alyosha.

Fyodor was courteous and attentive to clients. He'd take a boot into his hands, as if weighing it, wink jokingly at Alyosha, and say: "Turns out it's hungry, isn't it? Well, well, we'll have to feed it." Or else he would say: "Your booties, my dear sir, have served their full term. Time for them to retire."

The clients were of all sorts. Some would retort to a joke with another joke, others spoke in a grudging, ill-tempered manner, while still others haggled endlessly over the price.

Certain customers revisited the workshop from time to time. Alyosha already knew one of them, a university student called Kostya, a tall, lean young man. Kostya usually appeared when the master was not at home. He somehow resembled Fyodor. But in what? Perhaps because they were both tall? But the apprentice was round-shouldered from sitting hunched up on his low little chair, while Kostya was straight as a rod. No, it was not the height. They were linked by something else, but what it was Alyosha couldn't tell.

Whenever Kostya came he gave Alyosha a cookie or a handful of nuts.

"Here, Alyosha," he would say, "just sweeten your life with this. I see it isn't any too sweet."

"Never you mind," Fyodor would come to Alyosha's defence. "He's a strong kid, he'll stick it out."

"He's a bloodsucker, your Mikhei Mikheyevich, just like all the bosses he sucks your blood. Sucks and sucks and can't get enough."

"Our Mikhei Mikheyevich isn't the worst of the lot," would be Fyodor's answer. "He's just a tiny mosquito as compared to others. A miserable little mosquito. One flip would be enough for him. You should see how they squeeze all the juices out of our brothers at the factories. Am I right, Lyosha?"

Alyosha did not quite understand what they were talking about, but he thought of Lena who could barely stand on her feet after work, who was promised a raise over and over again, but got nothing.

After a short conversation Kostya and Fyodor would go into Fyodor's tiny room where they would stay for a long time.

"Perhaps they drink there," was what Alyosha thought at first. However, when the door opened both the apprentice and the student looked sober: they sang no songs, didn't stagger out, they even went on talking in the same manner as before—calmly and quietly. The student would carry his shoes away with him.

A very short time would go by—and Kostya would again appear.

"I wonder why that student wears everything out so fast," thought Alyosha in surprise. "Why does he go on

lugging wrapped-up shoes all the time? Fyodor must barely manage to repair them."

One day, as Alyosha was beating the dust out of the master's floor mats in the yard, the janitor and three gendarmes came in through the wicket-gate. While they were dawdling by the wicket the janitor was pointing to the house, the sheds, and telling them something.

Alyosha stood stock-still. "What's brought such company here? Could it be they want their boots repaired?"

"Lyosha," he suddenly heard a muffled voice say, "come here quick."

In the semidark corridor, almost on the threshold, stood Fyodor.

"They've come for me!" he whispered. "They'll probably be making a search."

"What kind of search, Uncle Fedya?" asked Alyosha in alarm.

"You'll find out later."

"When later?"

"Later, Lyosha, later. No time now. Listen to what I say. You've got a pail of garbage near the kitchen, right?"

"Well, so what?"

"I've shoved two books under the potato peelings, and also a bundle of papers. You'll hand everything

One day ... the janitor and three gendarmes came in through the wicket-gate.

In the semidark corridor, almost on the threshold, stood Fyodor.

"They've come for me!" he whispered. "They'll probably be making a search."



over to Kostya. Got that?" Fyodor squeezed Alyosha's shoulder.

"I understood," said Alyosha in bewilderment. "I'm to give everything to Kostya."

"And not a word to anybody." Fyodor embraced Alyosha. "Farewell, my friend. See you some day."

The feeling of apprehension and alarm overwhelmed him too unexpectedly. Nothing had as yet happened, but there they were, the gendarmes, and there was the janitor—they were carriers of bad luck. Here they were already quite near. Nearer still. But Fyodor had gone back to his own room. Alyosha remained standing by the door alone.

Heavy boots stomped up the stoop. Alyosha wanted to run away, but was unable to move. All four men crossed the threshold and saw Alyosha.

"Is Shanokhin at home?" asked the janitor.

"What Shanokhin?" Alyosha could barely say the words.

"Fyodor Vladimirovich Shanokhin."

"I don't know!" was Alyosha's frightened rejoinder. It was already clear that there was no getting out of this trouble, and still he repeated: "I don't know."

"Come along with us," said the gendarme officer.

Alyosha thought that now the gendarmes would catch Fyodor, hold him by his arms and legs and begin to beat him, and beat him, Alyosha, too, just for company. For having lied to them. But the gendarmes beat nobody, they just herded everybody into one room and forbade them to leave it, while they went into another room with Fyodor. Alyosha heard them asking whether he was Shanokhin, Fyodor Vladimirovich.

"Yes, I'm Shanokhin."

"And what about your real name—you haven't forgotten it yet, have you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, you don't? Don't you worry, we'll remind you."

What else they talked about Alyosha couldn't make out, for they closed the door tightly.

Mikhei Mikheyevich, drunk since early morning, couldn't at first understand what was happening. He remembered the big-nosed client and began to insist that he had returned the books to that rogue and bum.

Mikhei Mikheyevich jumped up several times and ran to the door at which a gendarme stood. Pointing to Alyosha, he shouted:

"He's my witness! Here he is!.. The kid delivered the boots himself."

"Hold it, dad, hold it," said the gendarme lazily. "What's the commotion?"

But Mikhei Mikheyevich couldn't do without commotion. He ran up to Alyosha.

"Did you deliver the boots into his own hands? His own hands?"

"Right into his own hands," answered Alyosha.

"Into his own hands! See?" and Mikhei Mikheyevich stopped before his wife who sat on a chair with a blank look on her face, as if she had been hit over the head with something heavy.

Then they began to summon everybody, one by one, into the other room. The officer asked the questions, while one of the gendarmes took it all down on paper.

The first to be summoned was Mikhei Mikheyevich. However, they didn't want to talk much with him, and so he soon came back, already slightly abashed. He no longer pestered everybody with the big-nosed man and his boots, he stopped cursing thieves and bums, but from time to time he uttered: "Here's a pretty kettle of fish!"

The second one to go was Marya Petrovna. She, too, came back very soon, still more frightened than she had been, with reddened eyes. She sat down on her chair and continued to stare blankly at the others. From time to time she raised a dirty handkerchief to her face and wiped her eyes.

"Maybe they beat her?" thought Alyosha, but immediately discarded this idea. She would have raised such a screech—you'd have to stop your ears.

Finally, Alyosha was called out.

"Suppose they beat me?.. I won't tell anyhow. I know nothing, I've seen nothing. It's none of my business. So there."

The officer and the gendarme who was writing sat at one table, Fyodor was seated separately, at the wall.

It seemed to Alyosha that Fyodor even smiled slightly at him. He felt better at once, easier.

"Surname?" barked the officer.

Alyosha looked at his boots. They were well-polished, shiny boots, made of good leather.

"What's your last name, you dunce," said the officer loudly.

Alyosha looked at his face and only then understood that the question had been addressed to him.

"Kuznetsov," he said.

"Given name?"

"Alexei."

"How long have you been working here?"

"Since last summer." Alyosha felt that he was not at all scared, not even a teeny-weeny bit. The officer had a white, well-shaven face, and his moustache was neatly trimmed. "Although he did call me a dunce, such a person won't hit you. Not at all like Mikhei Mikheyevich..."

"Do you know this person well?" The officer indicated Fyodor.

"I don't know him."

"What!" cried the officer loudly.

The gendarme lifted his head from his papers.

Fyodor also looked surprised.

Alyosha understood that he had foolishly overdone it. Of course the officer knew that they worked together. Lie one should, but carefully.

"A-a-ah, you mean Uncle Fedya? Sure I know him, what d'you think?" he hastened to correct his error.

The officer's face was no longer white. Blotches appeared on it, his eyes sparkled threateningly, and even his moustache seemed to bristle angrily.

"You'd better watch out!" said the officer. "If you try to play the fool we'll talk differently. We'll return your brains to their proper place immediately."

"This kind can beat anyone up. Just look at his eyes popping. He'd hit harder than Mikhei Mikheyevich. He'd hit—and how!"

"Do many people come to see him?" asked the officer.

"Lots. Some order new boots, some need heels or

half-soles. Sometimes the both of them—him and Mikhei Mikheyevich—barely manage to do the work on time. Now I've begun to help them out." Alyosha glanced fleetingly at Fyodor, and again it seemed that a barely noticeable smile appeared on Fyodor's face. "Sometimes you get so out'n out tired, you just..."

"You answer my questions," interrupted the officer, "give me none of that empty prattle. Do you know his friends? The ones who are more frequent visitors?"

"No, I don't know any."

"Do you mean that one and the same people never come again?"

"Course they do," smiled Alyosha. "There was this guy who..."

"Wh-what? What's his name?"

"I dunno. Very hook-nosed, this here guy. We got really tired to death of him. Mikhei Mikheyevich says we never took your boots, and he says—you did. Mikhei Mikheyevich was under the weather then, so..."

"Enough," the officer cut him short. "Get out!"

Several hours later, after the gendarmes had turned everything in the house and the sheds upside down, they took Fyodor away.

The janitor remained: Mikhei Mikheyevich invited him to share a bottle of vodka.

"Come along, chum," he said, "let's sit down for a bit, everything is so sickening in here," Mikhei Mikheyevich pressed a hand to his chest.

In the evening, when one of their clients came to the shop, Alyosha heard his master explain:

"The janitor told me that this Fyodor of mine had been cooking up something against our Father the

Tsar. He was sent to a convict prison, but managed to escape. They'd been looking for him for a long time, but couldn't find him. They say his proper name is Neuyomov. A suitable name, for sure.* But however you look at it..."

Marya Petrovna moaned and crossed herself, wailing over and over again:

"Oh, God help us, what an evil day on us! Oh, a punishment it is! We've been cherishing a viper in our bosom. God have mercy on us!"

Kostya appeared in the workshop on the third day after these events. He calmly pushed a few sugar candies into Alyosha's hand, and then asked Mikhei Mikheyevich:

"Hey, boss, are my shoes ready?"

"Ready, ready," muttered Mikhei Mikheyevich. "Here, student, take your trash away and don't bring any more."

"Why not?"

"There isn't enough time to sew new boots, let alone taking care of your holes."

"Why is that, permit me to inquire?"

Mikhei Mikheyevich answered glumly:

"Fyodor's been taken away, that's why, and I have no more than two hands."

"What do you mean—taken away?" asked Kostya in surprise.

"You've heard nothing? It's all very simple. They took him away and put him in the hoosegow—and that's an end to it."

* A name stemming from a word meaning "indefatigable, tireless".— Tr.

"You don't say!" Kostya almost dropped his shoes, he was so amazed. "Can it really be that he's stolen something?"

Alyosha could barely resist the urge to reveal everything. "Eh, Kostya," he wanted to say, "you don't know anything! Why, Fyodor, you know, he's..."

"If it were only for stealing!.." said Mikhei Mikheyevich.

"Then why did they arrest him?"

"You'll find out all in good time."

The student wrapped up his shoes in paper. As he was leaving he imperceptibly beckoned to Alyosha.

In the corridor Alyosha gave Kostya the books and the bundle of papers.

"Everything here?" asked Kostya.

"Yes, everything."

"Thanks, kid," whispered Kostya. "Does anybody know about this?"

"Nobody at all. Is it true that our Fyodor was against the Tsar?" Even his own question frightened Alyosha.

"Yes, it's true."

"But why?"

Kostya reflected for a moment, and then said:

"So that boys like you could live a better life. Well, I've got to go. I mustn't stay here. Take my advice: leave this master of yours. Remember my address, just in case: Maly Vlashevsky, number four. Will you remember?"

"I'll remember."

"Goodbye."

The student slammed the door and Alyosha felt as

sadly depressed as at the time when he had first been beaten.

"Alyoshka!" shouted Mikhei Mikheyevich. "Where are you, you scoundrel? Go kindle a fire in the oven, it's cold in the house."

"WAR!.."

Another six months went by.

After Fyodor's arrest the master no longer called Alyosha to help him in the workshop, although there was more work than ever. Mikhei Mikheyevich drank still more, didn't finish his work in time, was mad at everybody and his shouts of "Spongers! Parasites!" were heard ever more often. If Alyosha happened to be close enough the master would strike out at him with whatever was handy.

One hot day in July Alyosha was hanging out the wash in the yard. Marya Petrovna made him tie the clothesline up high: he had to take a crate, put a stool on it, and place a low chair on the stool.

He almost fell several times when tying the clothesline. But Marya Petrovna kept saying:

"Higher, higher up. Dust flies up from the ground. It's you who'll have to re-wash the things."

Still, it wasn't such a difficult job to hang up the clothesline. But hanging out the wash was pure torture: the structure made up of the crate, stool, and chair had to be moved along all the time, and then Alyosha had to climb to its top, holding the wash in his hands.

Marya Petrovna got tired of sitting out in the heat.

She yawned several times and went into the house.

There seemed to be as much washing left in his washing basket as before. He had to climb up and down endlessly: up to the line, down—to the basket. Up—down, up—down...

Alyosha climbed to the top of his structure and hung out a towel. Then he looked up into the sky and suddenly froze: six white pigeons were circling over the rooftops. "Could they be Seryoga's?" he thought. When had he last seen them? He could hardly remember.

The pigeons were spinning one circle after another. At times they seemed to be flying right under the sun, and then Alyosha's eyes smarted. He shut them, but the sun's yellow face still floated before them; then the birds veered away and Alyosha could again gaze at them, holding his breath and forgetting about everything on earth.

Suddenly everything—the clouds, the pigeons, and the clothesline swung away and Alyosha felt himself falling. He caught convulsively at the line, but it immediately broke and he fell to the ground.

At first Alyosha didn't even feel any pain. He jumped to his feet and rushed to the clothesline. But what was the use? The white wash that he had been afraid to breathe on was lying in the dust, soiled.

Alyosha was stunned with fear. The old woman might come out any minute, and he could just imagine how she would yammer and complain when she saw what had happened, and then off she'd shuffle to get Mikhei Mikheyevich. And Mikhei Mikheyevich, screaming "Villain!", would rush to Alyosha and begin to beat

him. Whatever the boy might do—cover his face, fall to the ground, or run around the yard—the master's bony hand would reach him.

In a daze, Alyosha looked up into the sky. The pigeons, as if nothing had happened, continued to circle.

"Oh, if I could only fly away from here! Just anywhere—just get away!"

But what was the use of such thoughts? There was no way to escape from Mikhei Mikheyevich and his wrath. No way...

"No way? But if I just ran away?!"

Alyosha didn't even stop to think this over—his feet were already carrying him at full speed across the courtyard to the wicket in the gate.

He snatched at the handle and rushed out into the street. One street, another, a third... He was out of breath, but couldn't make himself stop. Now it was no longer fear that drove him—it was joy, because now Mikhei Mikheyevich would never be able to catch him. Now he would never have to listen to the shoemaker's shrill screams, nor to the endless groans and complaints of his wife.

So that was that! But where was he to go?

He had already once tried to return to his mother. Of course, Mother would let him stay, she wouldn't drive him away. But she'd be upset; another mouth to feed again. No, he wouldn't go home. He'd had enough to that!

He couldn't even bear to think about returning to the shoemaker. "I'd rather die of hunger than go back there!"

Suddenly Alyosha remembered about Kostya, the student. It was not an accident that he'd given Alyosha his address: Maly Vlasyevsky, number four.

Alyosha started to ask people the way to Maly Vlasyevsky. Some knew where it was, others didn't. Well, he was in no hurry anyhow.

He stopped by the shopwindows, gazed at the passers-by, listened to people's talk.

Alyosha was already near Maly Vlasyevsky when he suddenly heard an organ playing in one of the courtyards. He looked in and saw an old man with a street-organ, surrounded by a group of children.

The organ-grinder wore a wide-brimmed hat. Turning a shiny handle he sang, in a hoarse voice:

*Fate us has parted, oh, parted,
We in alien places must dwell...*

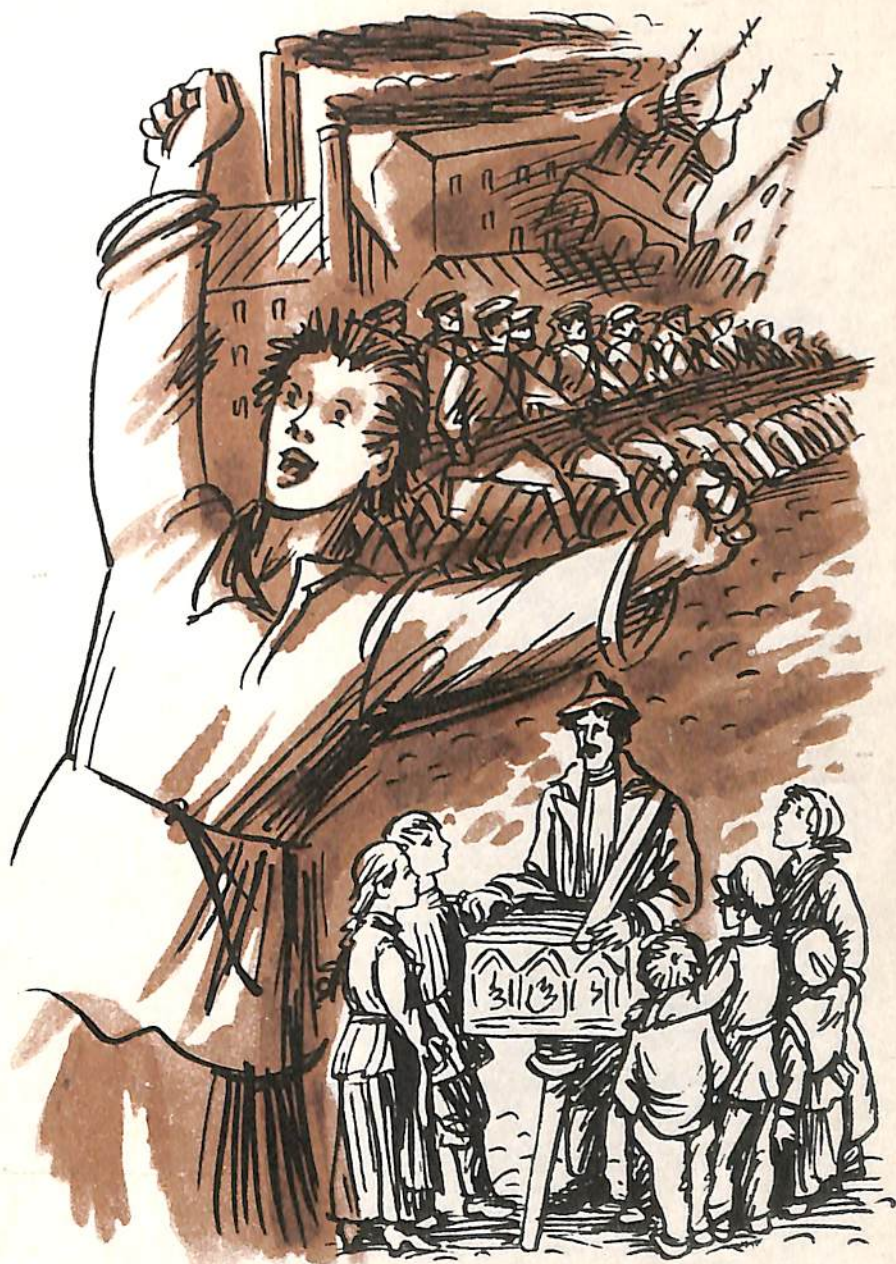
From under the brim of the shabby hat, pushed low over his forehead, a pair of dull eyes looked out indifferently at the listeners. The organ-grinder, who had been grinding out his music for many years, was well aware that he wouldn't get even a kopeck out of these kids. But perhaps somebody might throw a coin out of a window for him...

The organ—a box propped on one leg—wearily poured out the drawn-out melody. Apparently, there

The organ-grinder wore a wide-brimmed hat. Turning a shining handle he sang, in a hoarse voice.

Suddenly a shrill boyish voice broke in, crying:

"War!.. War!.."



was something wrong with the instrument, because at times the melody came out in jerks.

However, the old man paid no attention to this. Neither did the children who stood quietly, their mouths open.

Suddenly a shrill boyish voice broke in, crying:
"War!.. War!"

The organ made a whimpering sound and stopped.

Everybody turned to the boy whose shouting had killed the music.

"Why the yelling, you dunce?" The organ-grinder wiped the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Cross my heart—war's been declared," said the boy excitedly. "With the Germans!.. Our Arkhip said so. We, he said, we'll smash their Tsar ... or what's his name—Kaiser, to smithereens... Come on, kids, let's run to the barracks! Hoor-ra-ay!"

Alyosha ran with the others.

When he was halfway there he remembered that he hadn't found Kostya.

"No matter," he thought, "since such a thing's happened I've got to go home. I'll find another time to see the student."

At the barracks soldiers were being drilled in a large field. One command after another was heard: "Order arms!" "Slope arms!" "Present arms!"

Alyosha's heart seemed to stop: how sweet these words sounded!

THE STUDENT KOSTYA

War, war—that was the only thing people spoke about.

Opinions differed. Some people, like that Arkhip, affirmed that short shrift would be made of the Kaiser; others were in doubt: the Hun he's strong, it's no easy matter to overcome him. There were also those who advised: you'd better go ahead and buy up salt while it's still on sale, by winter there won't be any.

Now many military men were seen in the streets. Alyosha learned to recognise their badges of rank, he knew all about crosses and medals, too.

One day two armoured motor-cars rumbled along the street. They didn't go very fast, and a crowd of boys ran alongside, shouting "Hurrah!" and trying to at least touch the formidable machines.

Alyosha footed it with the gang and also yelled "Hurrah!" It seemed to him that he was running in an attack on the German trenches. The only thing missing was a bayonet or a spear, like the one held by the Cossack Kuzma Kriuchkov.

Posters glorifying this hero hung everywhere. Kuzma Kriuchkov was a robust, red-cheeked giant who had strung a lot of puny, ugly little Germans on his spear as if they were mere bugs on a needle.

Alyosha did finally get to Maly Vlasyevsky to visit Kostya.

For some reason Alyosha had expected the house in which Kostya lived to be a big building, but it turned out to be a small, squat, one-and-a-half storey structure.

The ground floor, or, rather, the semi-basement, was occupied by a green-grocery.

Alyosha was going to ask where the student lived, but as soon as he entered the courtyard he saw Kostya who was standing by a door and brushing his trousers.

"Eh, Alyosha! It's good you've come. Right on time. Come in to my room." He led Alyosha up a narrow staircase to the upper floor.

Kostya opened the door and let Alyosha go in first.

The room was small but bright. The furniture—only a table, a chair, and a small couch.

"Not so swell," thought Alyosha, looking around.

Kostya, as if reading his thoughts, said:

"I need no palaces, brother. Something to sit on—and that's all. Besides, there isn't anything of mine here, I rent the room. The only things belonging to me are my books. Can you read?"

"Yes, I can," answered Alyosha in bewilderment.

While his father had been alive, Alyosha had gone to school for three years. He had liked to study and had been quick to learn. His father was happy over this. He'd say: "We're ignorant folk, nothing can be done about that, but you—you learn. A literate person compared to an illiterate one is like a seeing person compared to a blind one." Alyosha's mother, however, hadn't thought much of schooling. "If only they'd feed him there," she'd say. His father's death put an end to Alyosha's schooldays. Nobody so much as mentioned school. "Shoemaking," remarked the mother as she was getting Alyosha ready to go to Mikhei Mikheyevich, "is a much more hopeful business."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Kostya, and then he

pushed a thick volume into Alyosha's hands. "Here, take this. It's a gift from me. Ever read it?"

"Gogol" was written on the first page. "Selected Works."

"No," said Alyosha, blushing. "I haven't."

"Then read 'Taras Bulba' for a start."

"Uhuh," nodded Alyosha, wondering what the meaning could be of the words "Gogol" and "Bulba". He glanced at the piles of books on the table.

"I'd give them all to you," said Kostya, noticing Alyosha's glance. "But you're too young yet. You won't be able to manage them."

"I'll manage—and how! I used to lug bigger sacks at the shoemaker's!"

Kostya did not smile in response, but, quite the opposite, puckered up his brows and then said:

"This, kid, is no employer's sack. Books call for brains, not brawn. Don't you worry, when you grow up some more you'll read them all. If you take them home now they'll just lie around uselessly, I'm afraid somebody might even use them for kindling."

"They won't."

"No, Alyosha, I shan't give them to you. Don't think that I grudge them to you. No, I've got to leave anyway."

"For long?"

"Can't tell. Maybe, forever..."

"Where are you going?"

"To the battle-front."

"So you've been called up too?"

"No, nobody called me up. I'm volunteering."

"Oh, great!" exclaimed Alyosha in excitement.

"Why not take me along?"

"Out there, kid, they don't play games, you know."

"'Course I know," said Alyosha, offended. "I'm no..."

"You funny kid," smiled Kostya. "What do you think you could do out there? Nobody'd even let you have a rifle."

"Maybe they would! But if they don't I could just be near you. Shine your boots or mend your greatcoat—I'd be only too glad to!"

"Oh, boy, you're killing me!.. Mend my greatcoat... The ideas you get!"

"But of course," insisted Alyosha, "maybe it'll be ripped a bit by a bullet, or perhaps torn on barbed wire..."

"Shut up," groaned Kostya, waving a hand, "shut up, you joker!"

"But look," went on Alyosha, and couldn't think of what else to add.

"Well, all right, we have very little time, we won't be able to have a proper talk right now anyhow. Now listen, kid: one book isn't enough. You ragged that you lugged sacks, didn't you?"

"I lugged 'em, I did!"

"So take that bundle over there—take it home," and Kostya pointed to it.

"What's in it?" asked Alyosha inquisitively.

"Some of my things. Among them a coat, pants, a hat, shoes, several shirts. Now they'll all belong to you."

"But what about you?"

"Well, if I do get back from the war I'll find myself some clothes. But you, Alyosha, you need these things

now. Life is becoming more and more difficult with every passing day. Well, you know all that yourself. So—farewell, boy. Let me embrace you.”

Alyosha was walking homeward, carrying the bundle and the book, and his mind was struggling with the most contradictory thoughts. First of all—what joy! Wouldn't his Mum be glad: what a bundle of goods he was bringing. Then he thought of Kostya, and this was a sad thought: a wonderful person had lived nearby, and now he would be here no longer, he's left. Then an alarming thought emerged: everybody all around was talking of nothing but war, what hordes of people were fighting the Germans while he, Alyosha, was just fiddling around. Kostya says they won't give him a rifle. “But suppose they would!” thought Alyosha. “I'm strong, I'm no puny fellow, am I?” And he recalled the tiny bug-like Germans strung on a spear by Kuzma Kriuchkov. Alyosha tensed his muscles. Last year they weren't as strong, that's for sure. Now they were strong and hard.

“Hey, fellow!” a voice called, stopping him. But when he saw the owner of the voice he started.

Facing him was the very same tall boy who had stolen the sack of sunflower seeds belonging to Lukerya. Alyosha recognised him at once. Only the tall fellow had become still taller, and his neck thinner, so that his small head seemed to have shrunk.

“God help you,” he said amiably. “I see, friend, your tongue's hanging out with exhaustion, so I thought maybe I could help you.”

Alyosha silently backed away.

The tall one hadn't recognised him—he must've met enough dunderheads on his crooked roads. Besides, he didn't even look at Alyosha, he only tried to get a good look at the bundle Alyosha had slung over his shoulder.

Alyosha pressed his bundle into a wall and his back against the bundle. With his left hand he pressed the book to his heart, although, apparently, it didn't enter the plans of the lanky youth.

"What's the matter with you—the cat got your tongue?" The thief sidled up to Alyosha, his flickering eyes seeming to feel the bundle. "I know you, your name's Misha, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't," muttered Alyosha, understanding that the boy was trying to strike up a conversation, pretending they were acquainted.

"Uh, you do look a lot like Misha," he said. "Where're you going, huh?"

"To the end of nowhere, that's where!"

"Prickly, aren't you?"

"That's how I was born."

However, the lanky one's plans did not include an immediate quarrel. He said, quite amiably:

"You shouldn't be so stiff-necked—I only wanted to help you."

"Don't need no help—I'll manage by myself."

"Go ahead," said the lanky one regretfully. "Work loves fools." Then, suddenly jumping back, he looked upward and shouted: "Hey, hey up there! You're gonna fall, you crazy nut!"

Alyosha, too, sprang away from the wall and looked

upward. The lanky boy darted to his side, yanked the bundle from him and started to run away, but Alyosha managed to trip him up. As the thief fell to the ground, Alyosha threw himself at him and clutched his precious bundle.

Rolling over and over, they exchanged blows. Although the thief was older and knew how to fight, he couldn't overcome Alyosha, who was strong for his age and very good at dodging. Unprepared for such an opponent, the thief soon became tired.

"Look out, you viper!" he shouted, "I'll cook your goose!"

Alyosha fought silently.

The battle ended when people pulled them apart in different directions, while the bundle remained on the ground. Questions poured out: why such a fight, over what?

Alyosha told his story, but the lanky thief shouted his version:

"He's lying! I know him! He stole the stuff in that bundle, and now he's trying to put the blame on me!"

The bundle was untied, and a grown man's clothing came to sight.

"See!" yelled the lanky one. "What'd I tell you!"

"But this was given to me as a gift," explained Alyosha. "It's mine."

"Who gave it to you?" asked somebody from the crowd that had assembled.

"Kostya, he's a student, he did."

"Catch a student giving away his clothes," was somebody's doubtful remark. "Very strange."

"What's so strange?" interrupted a woman with a

basket. "I know that thug," she said, pointing to the lanky one. "He's a thief, a mugger, so help me God! And this one, too, I suppose. They were trying to divide their spoils and couldn't come to terms, so they started a fight."

Impatient voices came from the crowd.

"Call the patrol!"

"Why the patrol? Let's just take them to the police-station—that'll put an end to the business."

So they were marched to the police-station. The bundle and the Gogol book were taken along.

The police Inspector didn't have to listen for long, he recognised the lanky thug immediately.

"Well, Yardstick, you've been caught at it again?" he asked sternly.

The lanky one said nothing.

"Again working my precinct, are you?"

"I wasn't working anything. It's that guy over there," and the lanky thug nodded towards Alyosha.

"That's a lie!" exclaimed Alyosha heatedly.

The Inspector banged a fist on his desk.

"Shut up—I'll talk to you separately." Again he looked at the lanky boy. "Come on, Yardstick, give! Who've you cleaned out, eh?"

"I've got nothing to do with it," responded the lanky one. "He did it all by himself."

"Been working with him long?"

"I don't know him at all."

"Yardstick, you'd better come clean. I'll put you away, you know."

"Cross my heart—I don't know him," whined Yardstick. "I'd nothing to do with it, I hadn't! He

swiped it from someone, so why blame me!"

"Take him away," ordered the Inspector. "Let him cool his heels for a while and think. Now you," and he turned to Alyosha. "But no monkeyishness!"

Alyosha began to tell about Kostya, explaining that he was leaving for the front, but the police officer interrupted:

"You say you went to his house?"

"Yes, I did."

"Maybe you can even remember the address?"

"Sure I can. Maly Vlashevsky, number four."

"Nikiforov, go check it. It's nearby," said the Inspector to one of the policemen.

The policeman left.

"He's probably left already," said Alyosha.

The Inspector coughed.

"Naturally. Where'd he go to?"

"To the war. I told you already!"

"I see you're a real smart aleck. Well, well, go on with your yarn."

When Alyosha mentioned the book, the Inspector smiled slyly.

"Aha, so he told you to read it?"

"Yes, and he said to begin with 'Taras Bulba'."

The Inspector took the book, turned its pages, and found the place.

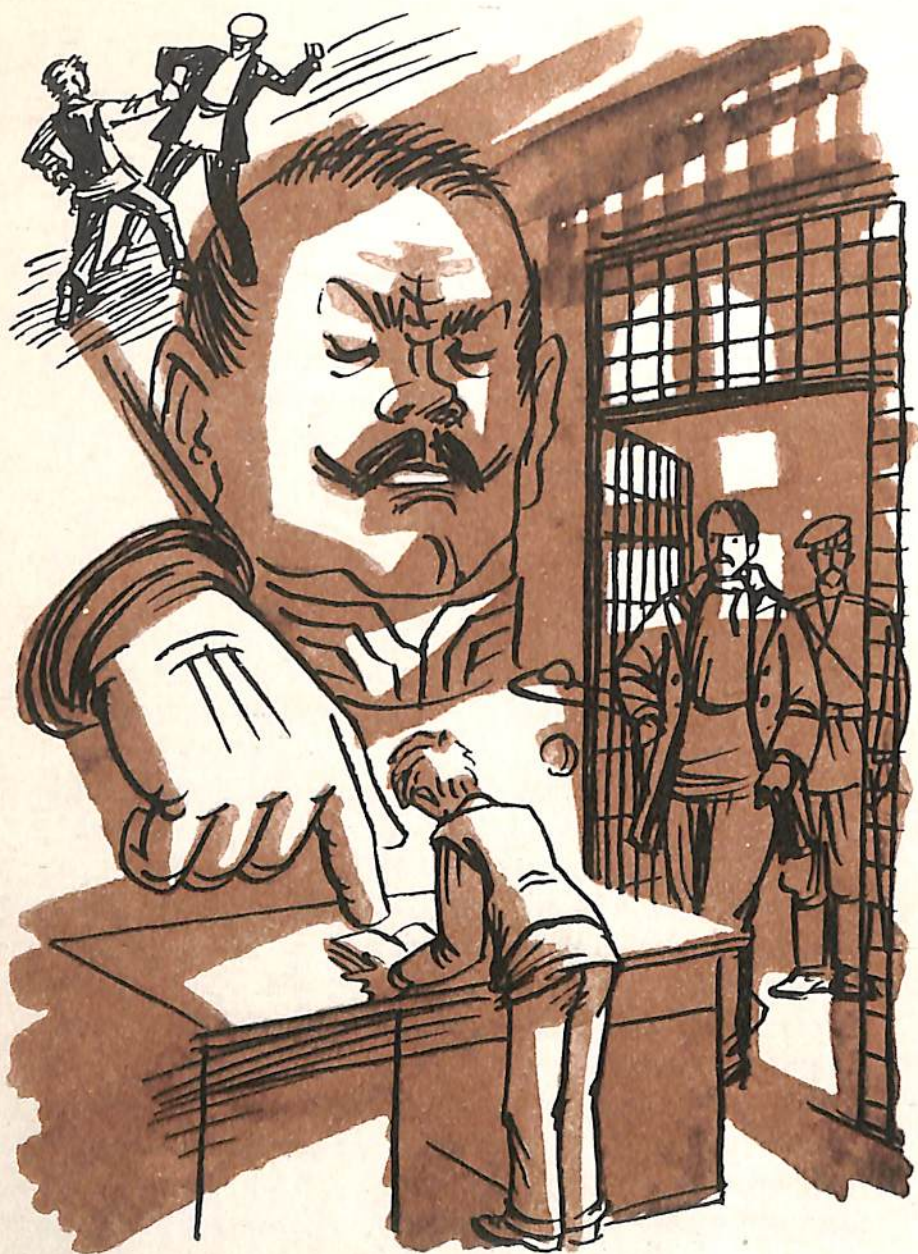
"Very well. Let's hear you read..." and he extended the book to Alyosha.

Alyosha took the book cautiously.

"Don't be afraid, it doesn't bite," said the Inspector.

"Go ahead, read."

One page carried the text, the other—a picture. It



showed a stocky, bewhiskered old man in wide, bag-like trousers. Two youths in long coats stood before him.

"Well!" said the Inspector. "Can't read? So that puts an end to your fable!"

"I can," said Alyosha and began to read, timidly: "Turn thee around, my son! Hm, a queer sight indeed! What kind of popish cas..." Alyosha stumbled over the word, but sucked in his breath and finished it: "Cassocks are these? Do they all dress so at the Aca... Acade..."

"At the Academy," said somebody's voice.

Everyone turned to the newcomer—on the threshold, together with the policeman, stood Kostya.

"Well, brother, this is a fine kettle of fish!"

"Do you know him?" asked the Inspector.

"Of course I do. And I gave him that bundle."

"Disgraceful," uttered the Inspector. "Those idiots don't look into things properly and then shake up the whole precinct. But how come, young man, you're so easy-going with your property? Perhaps you've come into an inheritance?"

"No, I haven't. As you see, I'm leaving one myself."

"Now come on! Why bury ourselves ahead of time?" said the Inspector in an altogether different tone of voice. "We'll put up a fight for our Tsar, for Russia."

"Personally speaking, I am not planning to bury myself," answered Kostya. "As for fighting—you are

The Inspector took the book, turned its pages, and found the place.

"Very well. Let's hear you read..." and he extended the book to Alyosha.

quite right, we'll fight, and how!"

"Very well. You may take your bundle. I dare not keep you any longer."

"And the kid?" asked Kostya, nodding towards Alyosha.

"Take him," the Inspector waved a hand. "We don't need him."

Kostya and Alyosha went to the door.

"So you've fallen in with crooks?" grinned Kostya when they were in the street.

"He'll catch it from me yet."

"Who?"

"That Yardstick."

Kostya laughed.

"Forget him. Let's go to a well and you'll wash up and brush your clothes a bit."

It took Alyosha a long time to wash, but his face was red anyhow, and there was a painful lump under his right eye. When he began to tidy his clothes Alyosha saw it was a hopeless job—everything was soiled, and torn in many places. Alyosha felt so bad—tears even filled his eyes.

"I'm just unlucky, Kostya."

But Kostya said:

"Now you stop that. Your mother will make over my trousers to fit you, and a shirt, too. And in general, if you think the matter over you'll see that you're a real lucky person, Alyosha."

"Oh, yeah!" hemmed Alyosha.

"But it's very simple. That Yardstick was unable to run away from you, that's one point!" and Kostya bent one finger.

"One," Alyosha smiled with difficulty.

"The policeman caught me at home. If he'd come five minutes later—finita, I wouldn't have been there and nobody at the police-station would've believed you. So you were in luck."

"In luck—so I was!"

"That's two! And thirdly—your clothes have turned into goodness knows what. Can't be worn any longer. So your mother'll remake my things immediately for you. Isn't that three?"

"Three it is!" laughed Alyosha. Not a trace was left of his mortification.

"But was that a guest you sent me today—couldn't be worse. I opened the door and—surprise, surprise—a policeman! Well, I thought, they've come after me. It's a good thing I have nothing in the house, I thought."

"What've you got to be afraid of him for?"

"Well, not exactly afraid, but in our business caution is necessary."

"What business? You're a student, aren't you?"

"One thing doesn't interfere with the other. And I'm going to the battle front not only to fire a rifle. Our work must be carried on everywhere."

"What work?"

"Revolutionary work," said Kostya quietly.

Alyosha glanced around and then asked:

"Against the Tsar, yes? Like Fyodor?"

"That's right. Against the Tsar and against such a way of life when some people have everything and others—nothing. Get it?"

"Course I do. Take Mikhei Mikheyevich..."

"Do you remember what Fyodor said? Mikhei Mikheyevich is a miserable mosquito. But he comes of the same stock, that's true. Don't you worry, we'll put an end to all of them." Kostya got out his watch and looked at it. "Where is your house? Far?"

"No, we're almost there."

"Then farewell again. You'll explain everything to your mother yourself. Goodbye, brother."

PORING OVER A BOOK

Alyosha began to read the book on the following day. He thought the beginning quite queer. The father, on meeting his sons, first of all began to fisticuff the elder one. After this he said: "Well done, my boy. Thrash everyone the way thou didst me—let no one get away with it!"

Alyosha liked these words. He recalled how he fought with Yardstick yesterday and touched the welt under his eye. What's black eye! It's nothing! Alyosha was proud that he hadn't let the lanky thug get away, that he hadn't been scared.

But Taras called his younger son, who was standing quietly some way off, a "buffoon" and a "milksop". Although Alyosha did not understand these two words it wasn't so difficult to guess their meaning.

"So that's how it should be—not let anyone get away with anything," thought Alyosha.

Day after day he now sat with his nose in the book. His mother was pleased with this at first—she was busy making over the clothes for him. But later on she

became apprehensive that the child might lose his mind. He even forgot about eating and drinking as he sat by the window, silently moving his lips. At times he would shudder and stop reading, but say nothing as he stared vacantly into space.

"Alyosha, don't strain your eyes so—you'll go blind," his mother would say.

Alyosha would seem to come to himself, but say nothing, and then bend low over the book again.

Coming home from work in the evening Lena was usually so exhausted that she merely took a bite of something hastily and immediately went to bed. Besides, the Kuznetsovs used their kerosene lamp very sparingly—kerosene cost money, too. The lamp was lit for only a short time.

Lena herself was illiterate. She had made several attempts to start to learn to read and write, but there was always no time and she had to give it up.

"You're the real bigshot in our family," she would joke, "you can read and write!"

One day, after Lena had come home from work, she asked:

"Is that an interesting book, Alyosha?"

"Uhuh," muttered Alyosha.

"What's it about?"

Alyosha made no answer.

"Look, he doesn't even want to talk to me ... Go on, tell me what the book's about!" Lena sat down at his side and mussed his hair.

Another time Alyosha would have been glad of a playful romp with his sister, but now he merely said: "Wait a bit."

"Then read out loud!" exclaimed Lena.

So Alyosha began to read aloud.

It was the place in the famous story where Ostap's execution was described. The whole household listened as Alyosha read how a great multitude of Poles assembled to see the captive Cossacks tortured to death, how the prisoners with their long forelocks marched along with Ostap at their head. Ostap's father, Taras Bulba, had managed to make his way into the enemy city to have a last look, from the midst of a crowd, at his son.

The little sisters on top of the oven had long fallen asleep; footsteps of passers-by in the street could no longer be heard, but the kerosene lamp in the Kuznetsov home burned on and on. Lena was enthralled by the story; the mother, too, listened attentively, sitting at Alyosha's side on the bench.

The tiny flame of the lamp-wick fluttered slightly. It was like a living tongue, there was something mysterious, incomprehensible in it, although by simply turning a small cog the flame was made to go down, melt and disappear. But with it disappeared the light, and it was so dreary in the dark!

However, now the little tongue flickered on and on without Alyosha so much as glancing at it.

He went on reading.

In his mind's eye he saw the execution place. Ostap in rags and the executioner. It seemed to Alyosha that

So Alyosha began to read aloud.

In his mind's eye he saw the execution place. Ostap in rags and the executioner.



he could actually hear the "horrific cracking" when the torturers began to break Ostap's bones.

Alyosha could hardly breathe. The sentences jumped before his eyes, and he couldn't make out the words. To calm down he stopped reading and lifted his eyes from the book. His mother was crossing herself, while Lena, her eyes glazed, put a palm over her mouth as she sat, her elbows on the table.

Now the lines came back to normal and Alyosha began to read again.

Again he seemed to find himself in that square. Next to him stood Taras, looking on as Ostap, without a single outcry, without a groan, endured the torture. "Well done, my son," repeated Bulba.

Together with Bulba Alyosha saw how Ostap looked around sorrowfully: "...My God! Everywhere strange, unfamiliar faces!" ...His strength failed him and he cried in anguish, 'Father! Where are thou! Dost thou hear me?' 'I hear thee!' rang through the universal silence, and all the million people there shuddered as one man."

Alyosha, too, quivered. He felt a lump in his throat and couldn't say another word.

Lena was sobbing, while their mother was silently wiping her eyes.

That night Alyosha could not fall asleep for a long time, and then he suddenly found himself in the wide steppeland, a faithful steed under him, loyal friends at his side. They rode the steppes, and in his ears rang the music of zooming bullets and clinking swords, and

heads began to roll from the shoulders of the Polish *shlyakhta** and the earth trembled under the hooves of Alyosha's troops.

Now only a few faithful comrades-in-arms were left, the rest had fallen in battle in various places. The group now riding with Alyosha was being overtaken by the enemy pursuers. As they rushed ahead Alyosha suddenly reined in his horse amid its headlong stride. "Wait! I've dropped my pipe and tobacco! I will not grant the accursed Poles even my pipe!" And he began to look for his pipe in the grass.

The Poles captured him, pinioned his arms and tied up his hands...

Alyosha knew what was going to happen after this—he couldn't stand it, so he woke up.

Dark as dark can be. His mother was breathing with difficulty, snoring slightly. One of the little girls said something in her sleep. Alyosha dared not move as he lay with open eyes.

He did not fall asleep again that night. He recalled the book, recalled his dream. The more he thought about it, the worse he felt. Ah, what kind of an Ataman** would he make? How quickly he'd woken up and how glad he was that it was all only a dream, that he was at home, on his own pallet. That he could awaken his mother any minute and she would immediately say: "What's ailing you, Alyoshenka?"

What sort of warrior was he after that? Meanwhile, a real war was actually being fought. How he wished he

* *Shlyakhta*—the Polish landed gentry.—*Tr.*

** Ataman—Cossack chieftain.—*Tr.*

could go out to the front-lines to fight the Huns! It was not for nothing that he ran to the barracks every day and watched how the soldiers were trained.

"I'll run over today, too," thought Alyosha happily. "For sure—Mum's already finished my clothes."

THE LIEUTENANT'S LITTLE BATMAN

Every day a crowd of boys gathered in front of the barracks. They all came to gape at the soldiers as they were drilled and trained.

Alyosha and Mitya were also here—Mitya no longer "worked" in the railway depot buffet since his mother's hand had finally healed.

Everything was going on as usual on the exercise grounds.

"Forward ... ma-arch!" came the sergeant major's command, and all the boys marched in the soldiers' wake. "Com-pa-any, halt!" and everyone froze stock-still. "Break ranks!"—and the boys rushed to the soldiers, spoke to them, asked permission to touch their rifles, while the braver ones even tried to test the sharpness of the bayonets with their fingers.

The sergeant major shouted at the boys, tried to drive them away, promised to "tear off" their ears—but it was of no avail, the boys reappeared immediately.

At first Alyosha and Mitya also marched with the soldiers, but soon stopped. What was the use? They were only twelve years old.

"If only we could get to the battlefield!" grieved Alyosha.

"Yeah, we'd show 'em, wouldn't we, Lyosha?" agreed Mitya warmly.

And again they spoke about their urge to get to the front-lines—before the war was over. Only—how were they to get there? What should they do?

"I know what we can do," said Mitya one day. "Trains leave for the front from the railway terminal—they stand on the sidings there. Lets start going out there. Maybe we'll be able to get away somehow."

"We can try it once," decided Alyosha, "we'll be none the worse for it."

"When do you want to go?" he asked.

"Why, right this minute!"

On the sidings there was always plenty of noise and bustle. Officers and soldiers ran hither and thither, commands were shouted, sounds of hammers and axes and saws were heard, horses neighed.

Soldiers kept on loading the cars with all sorts of crates and bales, they dragged carts and heavy transport waggons onto the platforms.

Smoke frequently curled from the field kitchens set up right on the platforms. One could smell porridge and *shchi*—Russian cabbage soup. Alyosha and Mitya were attracted to these kitchens no less than to the slip-covered cannons.

"Hey, kids, d'ye want to try some soldier's grub?" a cook would sometimes call out to them, and ladle a bowl of soup for each one.

Sometimes soldiers would be sitting and eating nearby. Rattling their spoons in unison against their bowls, the soldiers would ask: "It's good, this soup of ours, isn't it?"

"Very good."

"Since you like it so much—you'll have to work for it now!"

The boys helped the soldiers readily: it seemed to them that they were doing military work, even though they weren't at the front.

The months went by. Winter came again. The new year of 1915 began with bitter frost, and then came blizzards. Keening and moaning, they piled up snow-drifts and rushed away. Then the spring sun melted the snow, and still the war went on, taking its toll of life.

Trainful after trainful of recruits left for the front. From the cars came singing and accordion music.

However, more and more frequently another type of train began to appear at the terminal. There was no noise nor bustle at its sides. Nobody sang songs or played the accordion in it. Such trains arrived from the battle-fronts. They brought men who had already done with fighting. Everybody on the train had some "decoration": a bullet, bayonet, or shell-splinter wound. These were hospital trains.

Alyosha continued to spend whole days at the sidings. Mitya, too, was there. But now he and Alyosha were each one for himself: together they were more apt to draw the attention of the higher officials; besides, the soldiers didn't take them seriously, teased them:

"Hi, small fry, planning to go to the war, are you?"

"Eh, the Huns'll have to watch out now!"

"You didn't forget your chamber pots, did you?"

When Alyosha came alone the talk was entirely

different: where did he come from, who did he live with, how old was he.

Alyosha was a broad-shouldered, strong lad who seemed older than his age. Soon he began to look like a little soldier. For his zealous aid somebody presented him with a soldier's outfit. His mother fixed it up to fit him properly. Alyosha also acquired a mess tin ("What sort of soldier can you be without a mess tin!" he was told), and now he ate from it, sitting among the soldiers: he sang their songs, listened to battle-scene yarns and grumbled against the authorities.

Everything would seem to be in order: he was quite at home among the soldiers, had become one of them, but no sooner did Alyosha mention his wish to go to the front than again he was assailed by jests about not being dry behind the ears yet.

"Well, what's so funny about it?" said a moustached non-commissioned officer with two St. George medals on his chest. "In the regiment next to ours at the front-line the lieutenant had a boy batman. A kid—just like this one." He looked attentively at Alyosha and asked: "How old are you? Fourteen already?"

"Yes, sir!" barked Alyosha.

The recruits burst into laughter.

But the NCO said:

"You guys haven't had a whiff of German powder yet, but that young batman rushed into attacks with all the others, and went out on reconnaissance, too..."

These words made a deep impression on Alyosha. All that evening he kept thinking about that young batman.

Next morning he went to find Mitya. He called him

out into the yard and started with what was uppermost in his mind:

"Mitya, if you don't see me tomorrow it'll mean I've left for the front."

"Tell me another one!"

Alyosha paid no attention. He had already thought it all out and spoke calmly:

"Don't tell my mother, just tell her that the soldiers invited me to stay with them for a week. When the week goes by—then you tell her."

"What, Lyosha, are you really leaving? How'd you manage?" was Mitya's troubled question.

"I can teach you how, if you want me to." And Alyosha began to whisper into Mitya's ear. Mitya listened in silence, without interrupting, only glancing sideways to the threshold of his home and out into the street, afraid someone might interrupt them.

On the following day, as a military train was departing, Alyosha ran to a car and jumped up its step.

"Hey, you!" shouted the soldiers. "Where are you going?"

"Jump off!"

But Alyosha was already inside the car.

"But I'm in this regiment," he said, and began to look closely at everybody. "I'm lieutenant Sinelnikov's batman. My name is Kuznetsov."

The soldiers stopped talking for a minute, and

Alyosha began to whisper into Mitya's ear. Mitya listened in silence, without interrupting.

The train was gathering speed, its wheels clicking faster and faster. Moscow was receding.



then one of them asked:

"What regiment did you say?"

"The seventy-first," was Alyosha's prompt answer—he remembered the number of the regiment that had left on the previous day.

"Eh, you're a real blockhead, you are! Lost your regiment! Must've overeaten your mother's pancakes."

"Yes, sir!" rapped out Alyosha.

Everybody laughed.

"Well, all right, we'll catch up with your regiment. Take a berth, go on."

The train was gathering speed, its wheels clicking faster and faster. Moscow was receding.

Alyosha imagined how upset his mother would be when Mitya told her the truth, how Lena would start crying, how the little sisters would weep loudly without understanding what was the matter.

A sadness overwhelmed Alyosha. He curled up tightly, his knees drawn up to his very nose. Suddenly the soldiers began to sing.

Alyosha joined in the singing, too.

The train chugged along, its wheels clicking—a day, two, three...

Past them glided the Russian countryside: silvery birch woods, fields, the stacks still standing in them; gullies with busily burbling streams in their depths. There was no end to the hamlets, villages and towns the train passed.

There were frequent stops, sometimes long ones, sometimes for no more than a minute or two.

At every stop they were immediately surrounded by women, young girls and children. A lively trade started immediately. The soldiers bought cucumbers, pickles, salted mushrooms, baked potatoes, sunflower seeds, apples—all in small amounts, for they had very little money. However, they eagerly poured out of the cars at every stop, for it gave them pleasure to mill about among the crowds of women and children, they gladly struck up conversations with them.

They asked whether the woman they were speaking with was selling potatoes from her own patch, they wanted to know how much land her family owned and whether they had a horse. With the young girls the talks were of other things: brides and grooms, betrothals, faithfulness and unfaithfulness. The girls giggled and blushed, but never left before the train did.

The batmen bought chickens for their officers. They bought quickly, without any haggling over prices, and then immediately returned to their carriages, carrying away the wondrous pungence of a roasted biddy. As if by command, the soldiers' noses followed the delicacy.

The train now rumbled over the Ukraine. Woods became fewer. Now there were endless plains—the steppelands. Whitewashed peasant huts flew past, tall well cranes, stately poplars.

The speech of the people was melodious, soft. Alyosha found it strange to listen to them: half one he could understand, half—not.

Here the vendors at the stops offered *ryazhenka*—curdled milk, pies, boiled filled dumplings—*vareniki* and again sunflower seeds. The batmen bought geese.

After the Ukraine came Poland.

"When will we get to the front?" asked Alyosha.

"Wait a while, you'll have time enough to fight."

"The kid's hands are itching," said the soldiers, but they no longer laughed. Songs were heard less frequently.

At the stops it was permitted to get off only with an NCO. No longer were there any talks with the population. Everything was strange and incomprehensible.

They didn't catch up with the Seventy-First Regiment, of course. Thus Alyosha remained with the soldiers of the Fourth Company of the Eighty-Fifth Rifles Regiment that arrived in the vicinity of Warsaw.

COOK, SCRIBE AND SCOUT

Alyosha was given neither rifle, nor sharp sabre, nor fast steed.

He was assigned to an auxiliary unit. He helped the cooks and travelled with the commissariat in the transport carts, and he was called out to the regimental stores—there was work enough everywhere. Alyosha became a favourite because he shirked no work, was quick on the uptake, and his literacy was also an asset: he was asked to write a letter, or to read one that had arrived from home.

Although he was kindly welcomed everywhere, Alyosha always preferred the Fourth Company to which he had been assigned. The soldiers in this company were his "own people"—he even addressed

them as "Uncle Vanya", "Uncle Sergei", "Uncle Grisha".

"Just look what a 'nephew' they've got themselves," the soldiers of other companies would laugh.

"He's not a nephew—he's our son," his "Uncles" would respond.

Alyosha became particularly attached to a soldier everybody called Ded (Grandad), although he was not more than forty (his surname was Dedov).

During the very first march—it was about 30 miles—Alyosha was initiated into the hardships of soldiering. It was raining as they tramped through the mud. The waggons got stuck and the soldiers had to pull them out every now and then. Moreover, their accoutrements got wet through and through, becoming very heavy.

Alyosha could barely move his feet. Another step, it seemed, and he would fall. He'd fall anywhere at all—into the mud or into a puddle, no matter, if only he could lie down, if only he didn't have to go on.

The soldiers walked in silence. Water squelched under their feet, the mud gurgled as they plodded through it.

"Let's have your backpack, Alyosha," said somebody behind him.

Alyosha looked back and saw Dedov.

"What for, Uncle Stepan," he wanted to say, but didn't. Without a word he took off his knapsack and handed it to Dedov.

At first things seemed to become easier, but not for long. Soon his feet were heavy as lead.

Once again Dedov came to his aid.

"Hey, sonny, listen, I'll tell you a fairy tale."

"What do I need fairy tales for?" snapped Alyosha. "I'm no baby."

"Fairy tales—they're good for everyone, big or little. So listen. A peasant had three sons, two clever ones and the third, the youngest—a fool..."

So the old tale was unfolded as the soldiers plodded ahead. Alyosha listened to the artless story and forgot about his weary feet.

When the story was finished Dedov said:

"Now it's your turn."

"But I don't know any stories!" exclaimed Alyosha in a frightened voice.

"Not a single fairy tale?"

Alyosha recalled how he used to climb up to the oven top to his little sisters and tell them all kinds of stories, trying hard to make them as scary as he could. The little ones emitted half-stifled screams, making believe that they were stopping up their ears. "That's all," Alyosha would say, "I won't go on any further since you don't want to hear..." And then the little girls would press nearer and beg: "Tell it to us, Lyosha, go on, do." They knew that the end of the story would be a happy one. But that isn't the kind of story to tell a soldier.

"Well, all right, tell us something—not a tale, but something that's interesting," proposed Dedov.

Alyosha thought a while, and began the following story:

"Once upon a time there lived an old Cossack, Taras Bulba. And he had two sons, Ostap and Andriy..."

The puddles and the mud disappeared, and Alyosha again saw the open steppes and the wide Dnieper.

He didn't notice how the other soldiers stopped talking and moved up nearer to him, walking at his side, trying not to lose a word of the story.

Dusk fell, but the regiment was still on the move, and none of the soldiers knew where they were going and when this accursed march would come to an end.

Alyosha went on telling the story. When he at last finished, the soldiers began to argue. Some said that Taras was wrong to shoot his son, since Andriy was like drunk, out of his mind on account of this Polish girl. Some said that he did the right thing, since his son had gone out to fight against his own people. Still others said that the father should have beaten the daylights out of Andriy, but not killed him—the boy might have reformed yet. They almost agreed that it was all the fault of women, that all evil came from them. However, somebody came to the defence of women, and the argument flared up again...

Who knows how long the debate might have gone on if the command "Halt!" had not been passed back from the head of the column.

The regiment bivouacked in the woods for the night. An order was forwarded to all the companies forbidding them to light any fire or make any noise. Instead of a hot supper dry rations were issued.

Alyosha didn't wait for his rations, he lay down under a tree, put his knapsack under his head and immediately fell asleep.

On the following day Dedov talked the NCO into

letting Alyosha ride on a waggon in the transport unit. Alyosha didn't want to leave his company, he insisted that he had rested and could walk anywhere.

"Shut up!" shouted the NCO. "I'll have no kid's nonsense from you!"

So Alyosha went to the transport waggons.

The front-line was quite near. They could already hear the thunder of cannons and the wind brought the acrid smell of burning.

It's nice, of course, when everybody welcomes you warmly and calls you "sonny". To chop wood, to dump groats into a kettle of boiling water—Alyosha understood that all this was done for the soldiers, for those who were fighting the enemy. And to read a letter from home—how impatient the soldiers were for this!—this, too, had to be done. Still, Alyosha had pictured his participation in the war differently.

Alyosha had been taught how to shoot from a rifle, but as soon as an engagement was in the offing he was sent back to the rear lines, to the transports, and this was most humiliating. Out there, on the front-lines, battles were fought, men were losing their lives. Uncle Sergei was no more, nor was taciturn Uncle Vasya, and he was sorry for the NCO, although he'd been a pretty cross fellow—he'd been wounded in the head in the last battle.

In this manner one might spend the whole war standing by the field kitchens.

Perhaps that is just what might have happened, if not for a certain event.

On that day Alyosha, together with two soldiers, was bringing dry rations to the first trench-line.

Although the soldiers were glad to see Alyosha, the rations—three rusks and a lump of sugar—made them grumble. Everybody started to berate their superiors.

"They glut themselves with meat while we don't even count as humans!"

"They don't give a hang about us!"

"And what if we did the same?"

"Just look who's talking! What can you do?!"

"Naturally, he can do nothing alone," said Dedov, "but if we all got together..."

"What would happen then?"

A fierce rumble cut Dedov's words short.

"Seems the Hun's moved up his cannons," said someone.

"Getting ready for an attack."

As if in confirmation, several explosions at once shook up everything around them. Stones and earth began to fall on the soldiers.

Alyosha started to run away from the trench.

"Get back!" yelled the soldiers.

But a mighty force raised him up into the air and stunned him. Alyosha fell into a silent darkness.

After the artillery shelling the Germans launched an offensive. The Russian defence was broken: the regiment was ordered to retreat.

However, the German offensive was soon stopped by a powerful counter-attack launched by the mounted troopers who had arrived in time to the aid of the infantry. The Germans entrenched themselves, and

held fast to the captured positions. The front-line receded several kilometres east.

Thus, when Alyosha regained consciousness he was on enemy territory.

At first he couldn't understand why he was lying in some bushes and where all the others had disappeared to. His right hand was clenching something. He looked—three rusk. Immediately everything came back. He was just going to hand these rusk to a soldier, Dugalov, when the explosions erupted. So it meant that he'd been thrown over to this spot directly from the trench.

He had a headache and felt a bit dizzy. However, Alyosha managed to get to his feet and take a few steps. He was going to shout, to call somebody over, but stopped with his mouth wide open: helmeted soldiers were rolling cannons in the birch-tree grove nearby. They were chopping some of the young trees—the ones in their way—down at their very roots; they didn't throw these trees away but leaned them against the live trees.

"Germans!" Alyosha was dumbfounded. "But what's become of our men?.." He looked towards the line of trenches—there he also saw Germans. They were positioning their mahchine-guns, covering the emplacements with earth-filled sacks. The machine-gun nests were arranged at the edges of the line. There were no machine-guns in the centre, but in the flat

Helmeted soldiers were rolling cannons in the birch-tree grove nearby.

He was immediately caught by several hands.



field that had previously been behind the trenches sappers were planting mines.

Alyosha crawled back into the shrubbery and started to think about what he should do. He decided to wait until it got dark and then crawl over to his own people. Crawling was something he was quite skilled in—he'd had lots of practice getting from one trench to another in this manner.

Alyosha was familiar with the locality. Only, how was he to know how far the regiment had retreated? Besides, there was the danger of stumbling over a mine in the darkness. Peering through the branches, he tried to memorize the place where the sappers were working.

During the rest of the day he stayed in his hiding-place. Now he was very careful, he didn't even crunch his rusk, but sucked it little by little—he remembered how his little sisters had done so with the hard cookie. "How lucky I am," thought Alyosha, "that these rusks were in my hand. I'll eat one a day, and when I get back I'll give Dugalov a triple ration."

While his head ached Alyosha didn't feel hungry. He put a rusk into his mouth simply because he had nothing to do. But when it was finished his headache went away and Alyosha felt such pangs of hunger that he immediately got out the second rusk and began to nibble it. He got to the middle—his hunger wasn't appeased at all. "I'll gnaw off another bit—and enough." Again he attacked the rusk, took a look—only a miserable bit was left. No use in saving it—it'll only crumble up in a pocket. Or perhaps, still worse, get lost. Alyosha looked at it, looked again and then put it into his mouth.

It was quiet around him, not a single shot was heard, as if there was no war on at all. The birds were settling down for the night. Even the light breeze that had ruffled the shrubs in the daytime disappeared, too.

The soldiers who were busy with the cannons in the birch-tree grove stopped their hacking and chopping, too.

"It's a bad thing that everything is so quiet," thought Alyosha. But nothing could be done about it, and he had to get away somehow. When it got good and dark he started crawling. He was particularly afraid at the very beginning, stopping all the time, listening, hoping no one would call out to him. Later he adjusted to the situation and calmed down, but still went on crawling slowly, cautiously.

Alyosha was already quite a distance from his shrubs when he suddenly saw, several steps ahead, a human figure.

Pressing closer to the ground, Alyosha held his breath. To crawl back to the shrubs would mean losing a lot of time... Besides, what was he to do there? Sit in hiding right under the Germans' noses? Should he crawl backwards a little and then take a sideward direction? Suppose this person noticed him? Then, too, he might lose his way, the route he had been planning all day long, spying out the ground.

The person did not move. "Maybe he's noticed me? And now he's waiting." Alyosha lifted his head slightly and began to look more attentively. "It's one of ours! The uniform is Russian!"

The soldier had put his head on his arms and was asleep. Alyosha crawled nearer, intending to wake the

man up. Really, what a fine time for a snooze he'd found, with Germans all around!

"Hey," whispered Alyosha and nudged the soldier. His hand touched something sticky.

"Blood!" was Alyosha's appalling thought.

He crawled a few steps away, but then returned. "Maybe he's wounded?" He forced himself to touch the soldier once more. He touched his cheek. It was prickly and cold.

Alyosha crossed himself. Later he came across several more dead men, but all the time he seemed to see the first one, the soldier who had looked as if he were asleep with his head on his arms.

"I was lying like that, too, and everybody looked at me and thought I was dead."

Alyosha had already been crawling for about two hours when an explosion broke out behind him. "They're firing cannons," he thought. "Could they have noticed me?" But he immediately banished this thought. The shooting had stopped. Anyhow, who was going to fire at him from a cannon?

He came to the end of the gully. After that, he remembered very well, there was a large field, then a small wood and further on a few houses where the officers slept and where Headquarters was. Who occupied them now? The main thing was to get to the wood.

Alyosha decided he wouldn't crawl through the field: perhaps it, too, was mined. A road passed along the edge of the field. But there might be Germans on it. What was he to do in such a case?

Still, he did crawl out to the road. Along its side ran

a ditch. "If anything goes wrong—I'll tumble into the ditch," decided Alyosha.

He crawled uneventfully along the road, diving into the ditch only once: two carts passed by.

And here was the wood at last. Alyosha made his way to the first trees, and suddenly he heard a voice:

"Here, Sukhanov."

Alyosha lay low.

"Over here, man," and somebody threw a lump of earth at him.

Getting up from the ground, Alyosha went towards the voice: he'd been noticed anyhow.

He was immediately caught by several hands.

"Who are you?"

"Our men," was Alyosha's joyous thought.

"Let go. I'm one of yours."

But the hands wouldn't let go.

"Of course you are. But whose—yours? Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the regiment. To my regiment."

"What's its number?"

"Eighty-five."

The men who held Alyosha paused for a while.

"Our neighbours," said somebody at last.

"Maybe he's lying?"

"Who knows, maybe he is. He's very young."

And again they turned to Alyosha:

"So what do you do there, in the regiment, hey?"

"I'm with the field kitchen."

Then one of the soldiers said:

"Hey, turn around, let me get a look at you... Of course—it's their kid, for sure."

"How do you know?" somebody asked.

"I once went over to them for groats. On a loan. That's where I saw him."

"Are you sure?"

"He it is!" and the soldier thumped Alyosha's shoulder in a friendly manner. "I remember he even asked when we were going to return the groats. That made me mad, and I said: 'What business is that of yours?' And he comes back with: 'That is just my business' and begins to write something down on a piece of paper."

Alyosha, too, recalled that incident, and said:

"Of course—you took six pounds."

"See!" said the soldier animatedly. "Doggone my whiskers, isn't he a bright one—remembers everything!"

"But what were you doing here?" asked another soldier who, apparently, was in charge.

Alyosha told them the whole story: how he was stunned by the explosion, how he sat concealed in the bushes, how he studied the terrain, waiting for darkness to fall, and how he crawled along the gully next to the mined field.

The cannons and the mine field interested the soldiers and they asked for more details.

"Fellows," one of the men said suddenly, "seems like we won't be seeing Sukhanov any more."

"How come?"

"Because Sukhanov—he headed straight into the mine field, he did."

Alyosha understood then that the explosion he had heard was no shelling, it was a mine exploding in the field.

"Farewell, Fyodor," said the soldier in charge, "and you, kid, come along with us."

"My name is Kuznetsov."

"Come on, Kuznetsov. You'll report everything to our ensign."

Ensign Lukashin, the commander of the reconnaissance group, not only listened carefully to what Alyosha had to say—he made a plan of the dislocation of the mine fields, batteries, and machine-gun nests of the enemy on the N.-sector.

These data were forwarded to the divisional headquarters, where a military operation was worked out owing to which the enemy battery was completely routed and the positions captured by the Germans were re-taken.

After this Alyosha was acknowledged as a real soldier, and he was even sent out on reconnaissance ("Seeing as our sonny-boy has a real strong memory," was how the men of the Fourth Company explained it).

Ensign Lukashin was cited for an award.

His debt—the rusks—Alyosha never did return to Dugalov: in the last battle Private Dugalov was killed.

Another thing that happened was that Alyosha was now called "Kuznechik" (Grasshopper). For this there were several reasons. First of all—his surname Kuznetsov. Secondly, the soldiers could not recall without laughter how he had flown from the trench into the bushes ("Aren't you the prize long jumper!"—"That wasn't me—it was the explosion that threw me there!"—"Don't you give us that, Alyosha, you're a

grasshopper, and that's all there is to it!"). And thirdly, Alyosha was so smart at concealing himself when on a reconnaissance mission that you couldn't find him until you stepped on him. ("Just like a grasshopper"—the soldiers said.)

IN A LISTENING POST

One night the NCO burst into the trench, "Grinenko! Dedov! Kuznetsov! To your listening post!"

Alyosha and two other privates went crawling to the very foremost lines to replace the look-out.

During the last week all had been quiet at their section of the front. No gunshot reports were heard, except rare stray ones. It might seem that there was no need to crawl through the snow at night, mightn't it? But Alyosha was already an experienced soldier, one and a half years of fighting, and he knew just how deceptive silence could be.

Here, at last, was the listening post. Alyosha was to remain here for several hours, huddled by a snow-capped stump. He would watch the enemy. On his left, about seventy paces away there was Grinenko with his machine-gun, on his right—Dedov.

The enemy was close by. The first line of the Austrian trenches was directly beyond a narrow stream. Sometimes you could hear a tune played on a mouth-organ and somebody singing. A plaintive, drawn-out song. "Looks like they don't get their fill of meat, either."

Alyosha had seen captive Germans and Austrians.

Although ragged and hungry, they in no way resembled the ugly little bugs impaled by Kuzma Kriuchkov on his spear.

Dedov says they're the same sort of fellows as the Russians, only they jabber in their own language. "Kaiser Wilhelm and their masters," explained Dedov, "drove them to the war, while we've been driven by our Tsar and our own masters. Whichever way you look at it, it's the rulers who profit from war. Soldiers' blood wins new lands for them."

Strange things Dedov says. Nobody had driven Alyosha to the front, he himself had wanted to fight the enemies. Only, somehow things weren't turning out the way Alyosha had thought they would. The soldiers' field kitchens often had no fires in them—you got no dinner, no supper. In the Third Company the soldiers demanded that rations be issued—they were arrested and court-martialled. Everybody knows what the sentence will be—the firing squad. How does that figure—shooting your own men?

Alyosha made a clumsy movement in his shallow trench, and his sheepskin greatcoat slid off his shoulders—the greatcoat used by all who came on duty to this look-out. Without the sheepskin you wouldn't last an hour, you'd freeze to death.

He held his breath, listening. The singing in the Austrian trenches had stopped. "Gone to sleep, the devils," thought Alyosha and yawned drowsily.

Today, a letter had arrived from home. It was written by the husband of Lena's friend, and Lena herself had managed to scribble a few words, too. At home everything was the same, no changes. Mother

begged him to take care of himself. The little sisters had grown up a bit; they often spoke of their brother Lyosha, they wanted to know when he would at last come home from the war.

Alyosha smiled: "Funny kids! Who knows about that? Maybe the generals?" He slapped his mittened hands against each other, looked out attentively.

It was very dark. The moon's face was veiled in clouds. It seemed to Alyosha that moonlight made it colder, so he was glad the moon was hidden now. Without the moon, of course, visibility was worse. But Alyosha had sharp eyes. Over that way, right on the shore, there are two trees—you can barely make them out, and between them several stumps, like snow hats, but you can't see them at all yet.

In the letter it also said "regards from Fyodor". "What Fyodor can that be?" reflected Alyosha. "Could it be Uncle Fedya from the shoemaker's shop? But he was arrested. Suppose he ran away again? I'll have to ask Lena. Oh, maybe one shouldn't write about him? There's something called a 'censor' looks through all letters now. It's wartime."

The moon came out of hiding and the snow turned a glittering blue. There they are, the two trees on the bank, the stumps are there, too... Hold on! Seem to be too many of them—how come? "Austrians!" was his sudden thought. "Dressed in white, crawling!"

Alyosha felt hot, he threw the sheepskin coat off

The moon came out of hiding.

"Austrians!" was his sudden thought. "Dressed in white, crawling!"



and clicked the safety catch of his rifle. The stumps didn't move. "Must've imagined it. Only scared myself." Again a cloud covered the moon. A small cloud—but a dense one. But as soon as the moon came out Alyosha gasped: the stumps were still nearer now.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Alyosha fired three rapid shots, a signal for the other watchers.

The stumps didn't move. Alyosha took aim and fired another shot, at an end stump. A scream rang out. He saw several flashes among the stumps, and immediately felt something hot and heavy hit his shoulder.

On his left a machine-gun started its chatter. "Grinenko," thought Alyosha and lost consciousness.

In this night encounter with a company of Austrian scouts Private Dedov was also heavily wounded.

For about a week Alyosha and Dedov were in the regiment's field hospital, and then they were taken to the station in a waggon and put on a hospital train.

Alyosha didn't want to leave the front, he insisted that he'd recover right here.

"What a little fool you are," said a medical orderly to him, "another person would rejoice! Now you'll stay alive."

A soldier who was helping the orderly carry the wounded men into the train added:

"If only I'd been wounded like that!.." And he stopped, listening with bated breath to the distant artillery thunder.

THE HOSPITAL TRAIN

The train stood more than it moved. It was the last to be sent off from every stop. "They're in no hurry," said the station-masters. "They've finished warring. As for their wives—they've been waiting for three years—so they'll just have to wait a bit longer."

Alyosha's wound was healing. But Dedov's condition was much worse. He often ran a high fever. Dedov would throw off his blanket, although it was cold in the carriage—the stove was heated once a day, and it was too small to warm up the whole carriage.

Alyosha looked after Dedov, covered him up, gave him drinks of water, went for the assistant doctor.

When Dedov felt better Alyosha loved to talk with him. Dedov always answered his questions comprehensively, he looked upon Alyosha as an equal. He also asked questions—about Alyosha's own life.

"Yes, your life was no bed of roses, I see," said Dedov. "Everybody tried to do you dirty: Lukerya, then Mikhei Mikheyevich, and even, see," and Dedov lowered his voice, "the Tsar put his bit in."

"How do you mean—the Tsar?" was Alyosha's frightened rejoinder.

"It's all very simple. For whose sake did you shed your blood? Tell me!"

Alyosha didn't know how to answer. He remembered the officers. "For our Faith, Tsar, and Fatherland!" they used to say. "We shan't disgrace the Russian arms." But these were only words: the officers were not too eager to get into battles, they'd rather sit in shelters, but they were the ones who received awards

and promotions and held drinking parties.

None of them ever thought about the soldiers, the ragged, dirty, hungry soldiers.

Now Alyosha often sat lost in thought. So he'd tried everything: nibbled the soldiers' stale rusks, smelled gunpowder, and had even received some Austrian lead as a keepsake—only what had it all been for?

Alyosha looked out at the villages that floated past the window—abandoned, snowed-in almost up to the eaves—and it made his heart heavy. Then he thought of his own home—just as poor, just as miserable.

He was sick at heart with resentment.

Back in the regiment he had heard the soldiers talking about somebody called Bolsheviks. What and who they were nobody actually knew, but they were mentioned ever more frequently. One of the soldiers had said that the Bolsheviks were "awfully big people, giants, that's where they got their name from".* Dedov said that the Bolsheviks were just ordinary people—"like me, say," and, what was most important, they stood up for the working people. When the regimental chaplain was asked about the Bolsheviks he crossed himself in fright: "They'll burn in Hell! They've sold their souls to the Evil One."

On the night before he last went out to the listening post Alyosha had heard that there were disturbances in the companies. Leaflets of some kind were being passed from hand to hand. The soldiers said that they were the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* in which the chief Bolshevik, Lenin, wrote. The officers dashed

* "Bolshoi" in Russian means "big".—Tr.

around with revolvers in their hands, shouting about "agitation".

"What might it be, this 'agitation'?" Alyosha asked machine-gunner Grinenko.

"Ask Dedov. Seems to me he knows all about agitation and about Bolsheviks. Maybe he is one himself..."

Now would be just the right time to ask.

The wheels click and click. A week, two, three. A thought clicks, too, in Alyosha's mind: "Ask him!—Ask him!—Ask!" But he was afraid to ask.

Another week went by. At last it was announced: "By evening our train will arrive in Moscow."

"Little by little, but we've finally crawled in," muttered a puny little soldier whose head was in bandages.

"Everything comes to an end," remarked somebody.

"Only the war doesn't end."

"An end will come to it, too, just you wait."

"For us it's ended," said the puny soldier merrily.

"It's alright for you to beam," said another wounded man as he joined the group.

"Don't you fret, you'll get medical treatment, too. They've got swell medics in Moscow, sure enough..."

But the newcomer cut him short.

"Maybe they can make me a new arm, huh?" he asked, turning his right shoulder to them. Everybody now saw his empty sleeve.

The soldiers stopped talking.

Then someone said: "Know what, fellows? This'll be my first visit to Moscow!"

Now all the men began to put their meagre belongings together.

"If I don't ask him now, if Dedov and I part I won't find out anything," thought Alyosha. He had already made up his mind to ask, but the train slowed down as it approached a small station.

The station was full of shouting and singing people. Red flags rippled over their heads and they held banners with slogans painted on them.

One of the soldiers began to read the words aloud:

"Lo-ong li-ive the Re-vo-lu-tion! Do-own with wa-ar!"

The wounded men raised a clamour: "Go ahead, read some more!"

"All po-w-wer to the pe-op-le!"

The train came to a stop and everyone who was able to poured out to the platform.

Alyosha returned to the carriage in great excitement.

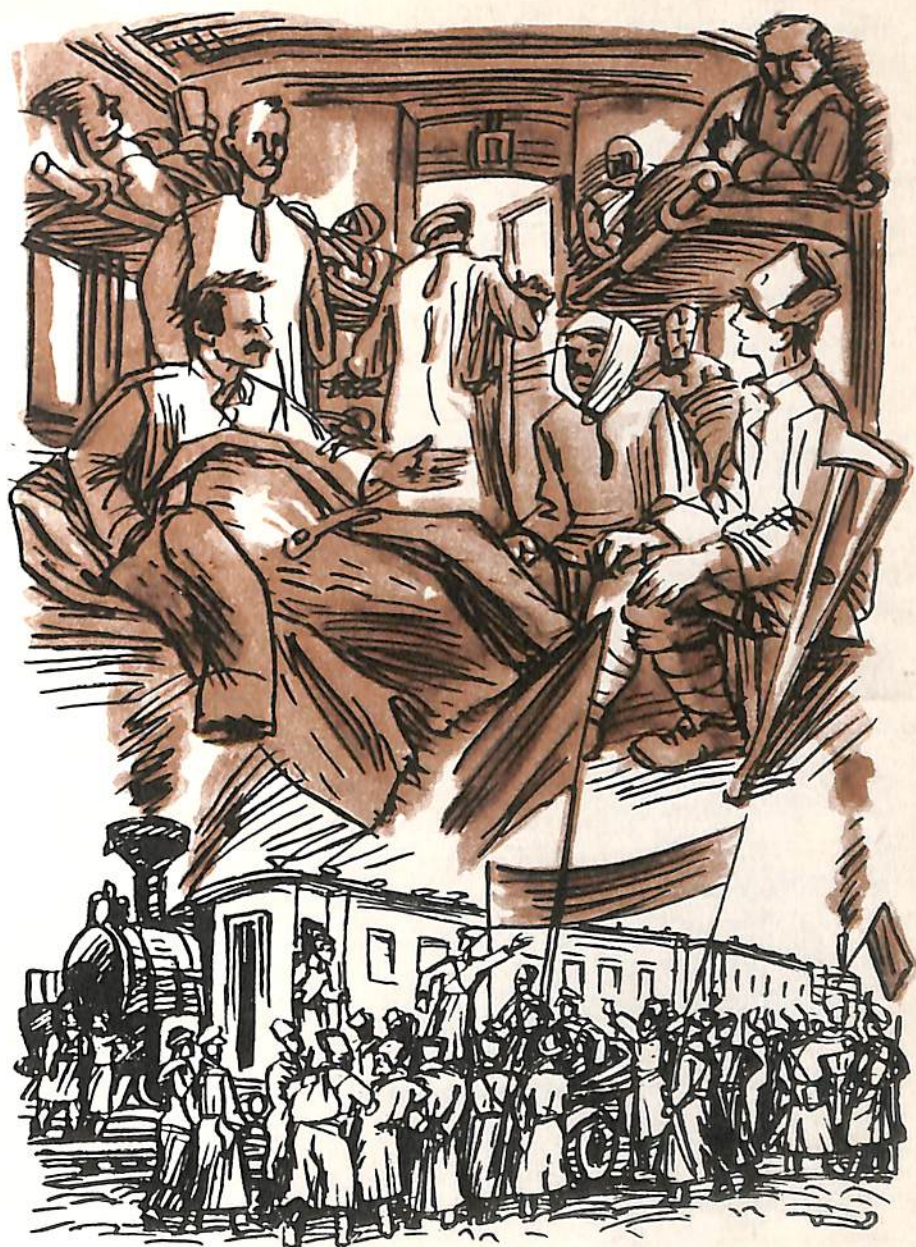
"Well, sonny, what's up out there?" asked Dedov, raising his head slightly.

"There's a revolution in Petrograd, the Tsar's been overthrown," blurted Alyosha.

"And what about the war now? And the army?" asked the puny soldier.

The station was full of shouting and singing people. Red flags rippled over their heads and they held banners with slogans painted on them.

The train began to move. The wounded men who had gathered around Dedov did not go away. They spoke for a long time about the war, the Tsar, about life in the city and in the countryside, argued about what the people's government should be like.



"We'll need the army to support the people's power. Eh, Alyosha, we've chosen the wrong time for being sick!" answered Dedov.

The train began to move. The wounded men who had gathered around Dedov did not go away. They spoke for a long time about the war, the Tsar, about life in the city and in the countryside, argued about what the people's government should be like.

When, finally, everybody had gone back to his own place, Alyosha made bold to ask Dedov:

"You, Uncle Stepan, are you a Bolshevik?"

"Yes, I am," calmly answered Dedov.

"Honest to God?" asked Alyosha dumbfoundedly.

"I don't believe in God."

"Now just look at that," thought Alyosha. "Stepan—a Bolshevik! If I'd known about it before I would've been scared. But what's there to be afraid of? Wasn't it Stepan who shared his last rusk with me? And during our first march, when I couldn't drag myself along anymore, wasn't it Dedov who took my heavy pack and carried it himself? And who stood up for me and other soldiers before the officers? Dedov again! Oh, I see that the Bolsheviks are good people, whatever the rumours about them may be."

BEHIND A COUNTER

It seemed to Alyosha that their house had become very small—as if it had shrunk during these years, sunk into the ground, stooped.

His mother was, as before, frequently ill and left

her bed only for a short while. She tired easily.

"Alyosha, my dear son," she said, "how tall you've grown! Your father would've been so proud of you!"

The younger sisters already ran about by themselves in the courtyard and in the street.

"Our Lyosha's come back from the front! Come on, take a look at him," they cried, pulling at all the neighbours' sleeves.

"The Germans made a hole in his shoulder!" bragged one of the little girls.

"Austrians!" corrected the other one.

Lena still worked at the textile mill. But she, too, had changed quite perceptibly. Her voice was louder, her movements bolder, more assured. She now attended a Sunday school where she was learning to read and write.

"Isn't it a bit late for you to learn your ABC?" asked Alyosha, trying to prick his sister's pride.

"But I'm only twenty-four," was Lena's glib retort.

"Do you take me for an old lady, or what?!"

Alyosha's wound was healing nicely, and he already thought of finding a job; he asked both Lena and his mother for advice.

"Don't be in such a hurry," was Lena's reply. "I'll talk it over with somebody I know."

Then, one day the door opened and on its threshold stood a tall, slightly stooped man.

"Greetings, soldier!" he said.

"Uncle Fedya!" Alyosha recognised him immediately.

"Let's get a good look at you, show us what's become of you," and Fyodor started turning Alyosha

this way and that. "And where's your St. George medal?"

"Oh, shucks!" cried Alyosha, waving away the question.

"Eh, you're wrong there, kid. My grandfather used to say that 'medals adorn the soldier'. Well, come on, tell me where you fought."

Fyodor looked so cheerful that Alyosha just had to ask him:

"Uncle Fedya, why are you so happy?"

"Because I see you. Aren't you glad, too?"

"Of course I am." Still, Alyosha felt that this wasn't the only reason.

"See? Besides, such a time is coming. Well, go ahead, tell me all about it."

They sat up late that evening. Alyosha described the offensive, the defence, and how he had gone on reconnaissance. He spoke about the hospital train and, finally, about Dedov.

"Dedov is gone," said Fyodor gloomily.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Alyosha.

"Dedov died. He was a good comrade and firmly believed in our cause."

"What cause?"

"In the revolution."

"That's when the Tsar was thrown off his throne?"

"Things didn't end with the Tsar, Alyosha."

"Didn't end? How is that? We have a government now."

"A Provisional government headed by Kerensky whose only concern is the money-bags. He does nothing for the workers and peasants. Since Feb-

ruary—half a year's gone by but the war is still on and all the land still belongs to the landed gentry. There was a demonstration in Petrograd—the government ordered the troops to fire upon the marchers. A lot of people were killed and wounded. Such things can no longer be tolerated."

"Course they can't," interrupted Alyosha, "but what's to be done?"

"We'll give Kerensky such a kick in the pants as we gave the Tsar. We're used to that already, aren't we?" Fyodor winked at Alyosha. "Our time will come, only we've got to get a bit stronger first. Now about you: you'll go to work in a wallpaper shop for the time being."

"A shop? But who'll have me?"

"I've already fixed it all up with the owner. He is one of us, a Bolshevik."

"So now I'm going to sell wallpaper, or what?"

"The wallpaper, Alyosha, has nothing to do with it. It's just a front. But the real business is..."

Several days later Fyodor took Alyosha to the wallpaper shop.

On the way Alyosha was nervous, he kept looking at his companion.

"Come along, soldier, come along. Don't you be afraid," said Fyodor.

"I dunno... I'm afraid I'll ruin something for you, Uncle Fyodor."

"But I know! I know better than you yourself do. We don't take just anybody for such a job."

They went a little further and stopped in front of a shop-window.

"I shan't go any further," said Fyodor in a low voice. "I mustn't be seen in the shop. To the authorities I'm unreliable person. Could be they're keeping an eye on me. I haven't noticed anybody tailing me, it's true, but we'd better be careful. Now listen. The shop is around the corner, on the left-hand side of the street. You'll pass three or four houses and see the sign. When you enter the shop, don't approach the clerk at once. Look around. Most probably he will be alone—so you tell him that I've sent you. His name is Pavel Sergeyevich. But if there are any customers inside, you ask: 'Do you have any green wallpaper left over?' He'll ask: 'Just what kind do you mean?' You'll say: 'The kind you had yesterday.' Got it?"

"Uhuh," said Alyosha. "It's like a watchword."

"That's right! No need to spell it all out to you: you're a military man," smiled Fyodor. "Now repeat what you must say."

Alyosha repeated everything.

"Right you are! Now go."

Alyosha found the wallpaper shop at once. He pulled the doorknob—a bell tinkled somewhere over his head. Alyosha entered and looked around.

The shop turned out to be a small, tidy place, wallpaper samples were hung in neat rows on the walls. He liked the place at once. There was no junk anywhere, as it had been at the cobbler's shop. The clerk was a real dandy, his moustache curled upward in a most handsome manner.

There was nobody else on the premises.

"Maybe there's some mistake?" thought Alyosha. "Could this kind of person be a Bolshevik?"

However, he stepped forward and addressed the man:

"Good morning, Pavel Sergeyevich! I'm from Uncle Fedya."

"Alyosha? I'm glad to meet you. Fyodor told me a lot about you." He extended a hand.

And that was how Alyosha's unusual job started. To look at it—there was nothing out of the ordinary about it: he helped his employer—brought in the wallpaper chosen by the customers, packed and tied up the rolls, and if Pavel Sergeyevich wasn't there—this happened quite often—he received the money from the customers.

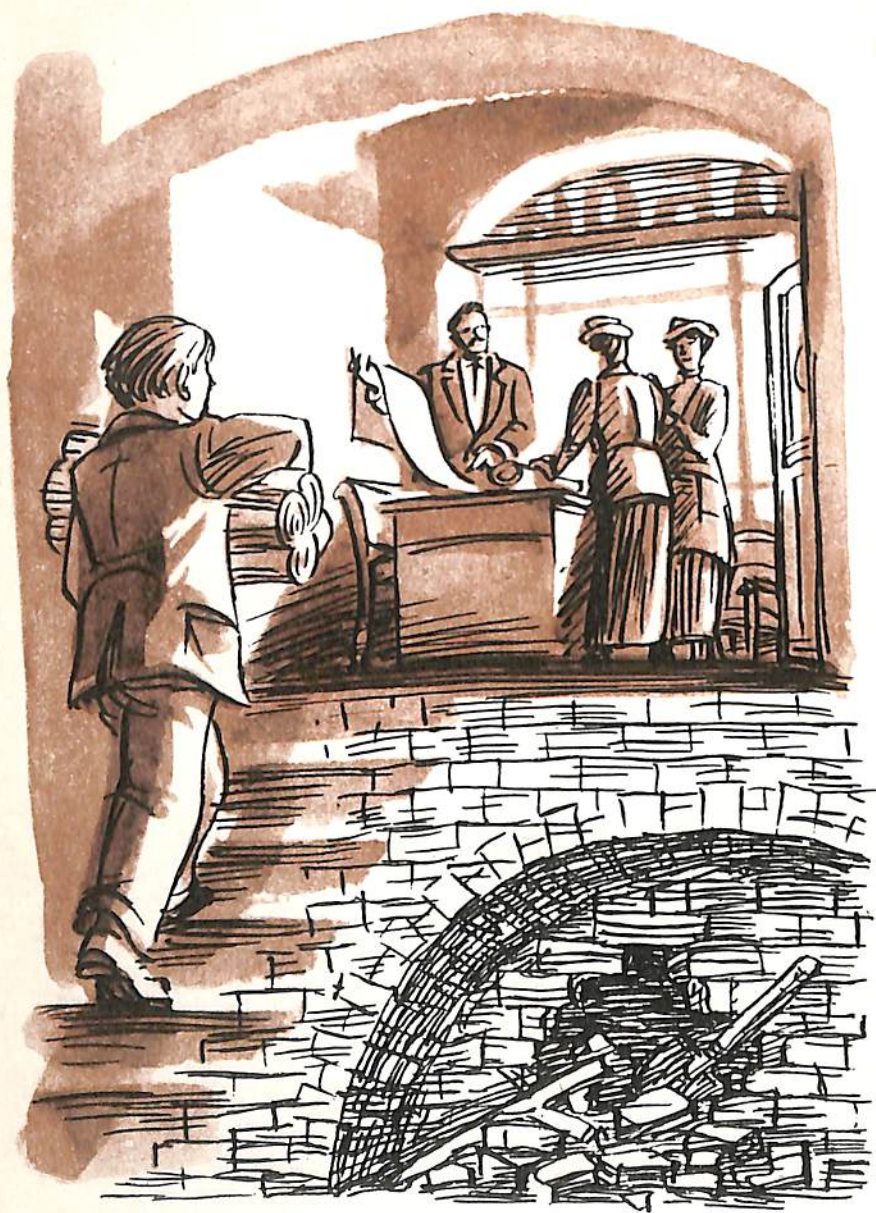
Quite a time went by, and still Alyosha had nothing to do with the other aspect of his job, the real reason for which he had been taken on.

Bales of wallpaper were frequently delivered at the shop. Several times Alyosha received them himself. But not a single one of the deliverymen had as yet said the words Pavel Sergeyevich had told him.

"Maybe he doesn't trust me?" flitted through Alyosha's mind. "Is he hiding something from me?" However, he immediately banished this thought. They had employed him, hadn't they? So it meant that they trusted him. Besides, every time Pavel Sergeyevich returned after having been away from the shop he would look meaningly at Alyosha and ask: "Well, anything up?"

Alyosha only shrugged his shoulders.

What made the thing more difficult was that Pavel



Sergeyevich didn't know who was going to bring what they were waiting for, and when. They were to receive certain cases packed into bales of wallpaper rolls. The bales were to be carried down to the cellar immediately; there a wall was to be broken down, the cases of ammunition cached in the recess behind this wall, and then the wall was to be bricked up again and rubbed thoroughly with dust, to make the new brickwork unnoticeable.

Pavel Sergeyevich went over the routine with Alyosha several times. He pointed out exactly where to strike the wall with a crowbar muffled in rags, he showed how to re-lay the bricks more quickly and how to cover up the wall afterwards.

They would both puff and blow as they swallowed dust, but after about ten minutes Pavel Sergeyevich would take off his smock, wash up and say:

"This is your drill, Alyosha. You know, don't you, the saying that 'the harder the drilling, the easier the fighting.'"

Coming up from the cellar Pavel Sergeyevich was again his dandified self: his hair neatly parted, his suit clean, a smile on his freshly-washed face.

The deliveryman walked heavily to the counter.

"Brought your wallpaper, Boss," he said to Alyosha.

He helped his employer—brought in the wallpaper chosen by the customers, packed and tied up the rolls.

"I'm not the boss," answered Alyosha.

"It's all the same to us. Our business is delivering." As he turned to go to the door he added: "One bale busted on the way, don't take it amiss."

Alyosha almost cried out in anger that they should have been more careful, but at the last moment said the words that had been on the tip of his tongue so long.

"The rolls didn't fall apart, did they?"

On hearing the answer to the watchword the deliveryman smiled warmly and said:

"Everything's in order. Shall we drive in?"

"Yes, do."

The delivery van was driven into the yard. About twenty minutes later the men left and Alyosha returned to his counter.

However, his face was flushed, and it seemed to him that a fire was aflame in his chest.

Towards evening the owner walked into the shop. Glancing at Alyosha, he understood everything and didn't ask his usual "Well, anything up?"

OCTOBER

The time Fyodor had spoken of arrived at last. On the 25th of October, 1917, a telegram was received in Moscow: the armed uprising in Petrograd had been successful, the entire power was in the hands of the Congress of Workers and Peasants—the Congress of Soviets.

Gunfire began to crackle in Moscow, barricades grew up in the streets. Detachments of armed workers

came out to fight the White Guards. Thousands of workers enlisted in the Red Guard.

This was when the ammunition hidden in the wallpaper shop was needed.

Pavel Sergeyevich and Alyosha worked without let-up, taking down the wall, dragging out the cases, stuffing the cartridges and shells into the bags the volunteer fighters came with.

"Hurry up, hurry up!" was the constant refrain.

When all the cartridges had been given away Pavel Sergeyevich said: "That's all, Alyosha, now we can close up our shop. It's served its purpose."

"And what's there to do now?"

Pavel Sergeyevich looked at Alyosha's flushed face and smiled slyly.

"I've got one urgent matter to see to," he said, "but I'm afraid you won't be able to cope with it—you have no experience at all in this field."

"Pavel Sergeyevich!" implored Alyosha, "you know me—just try me."

"No, no—you can't do it."

"At least tell me what the job is."

"That I can do. First of all, Alyosha, I'm going to shave."

"And that's your urgent matter?" asked Alyosha in disappointment.

"Nothing more important!"

"But you already shaved today."

"And what about my moustache?"

"Your moustache?" exclaimed Alyosha in surprise. "Such a moustache! I'd never shave it off—like an actor's it is!"

"That's just it! With such a pretty moustache nobody'll let me even get near to the barricade."

"What barricade?"

"I'll try to get to where Fyodor is, but if not—any other barricade will do."

"Do you know where Fyodor is?"

"Yes, I do."

"Please take me along, too."

"You? Well, all right. Only run home first—they must be worried there. Warn your mother and come back at once. I've got things to do meanwhile, too." Pavel Sergeyevich looked out of the window, the dark-blue dusk was already covering everything. "Or let's do it this way: you sleep over the night at home, but early in the morning get back here and we'll set off to join Fyodor together. Agreed?.. Don't frown, there'll be work tomorrow, too."

Through the semi-dark streets Alyosha ran home. His mother rushed to meet him from the stoop.

"Lyosha! At last!"

"Mom, why'd you get up? Go lie down, please!"

"Lie down! How can I—look what's doing all around!"

They entered their room. The little sisters were sitting at Lena's side; Lena was sewing something.

"Atailoring?" said Alyosha.

"Oh, we're worn out with waiting for you." Lena put down her sewing and Alyosha saw that it was a khaki-coloured bag. On one side of it was a bright red cross.

"What's that for, Lena?" he asked.

"She says she's enlisted in a flying squad," intervened the mother. "Why go looking for trouble? The men'll manage by themselves!"

"Flying squad? What's that?" asked Alyosha, fingering the red cross.

"It's a mobile first-aid team," answered Lena.

"A medical team? But what can you do there?"

"Anything that has to be done: give first aid, be a stretcher-bearer!"

"Who taught you all that?"

"A woman doctor, Dr. Bogolepova. She taught many of my workmates, too."

Such mobile first-aid teams were attached to many of the volunteer fighting groups. They were known as "flying squads" because they were always on the run, hurrying to where the fighting was fierce. They picked up the wounded, carried them to the domestic hospitals that had been set up, and then hurried away again to the battle areas.

The mother was frightened.

"But Mom," exclaimed Alyosha, coming to his sister's defence, "don't you understand what a help they are to us?"

"What do you mean—us?" asked his mother. "You can't mean yourself? Alyosha!" his mother stepped closer, clasping her hands. "I won't let you. Don't you dare! You'll stay at home, you will! That's not what you returned from the front for!"

"To sit at home? Is that what I came back for? To hide behind other people's backs?" Alyosha straightened his shoulders. "I'll do what I must do. Don't be angry, Mummy, I'm going away anyhow."

"Please, Lyosha, don't go," implored the mother in a quiet voice.

Alyosha felt sorry for her, he would have felt better if she had shouted at him and not spoken so meekly. But he said:

"I'm going. Don't try to stop me, Mom."

Next morning he went to the wallpaper shop.

Pavel Sergeyevich, clean-shaven, without his moustache, was clad in an ordinary, not at all dressy, suit; the legs of his trousers were tucked into the tops of knee-high boots.

"Well, Alyosha, let's go."

"Let's go," said Alyosha, turning in haste to the door.

"Stop. Let's sit down for a minute."

They sat down.

"You act as if you're going away on a long journey, Pavel Sergeyevich," remarked Alyosha.

"The longest ever, Alyosha. And I'm not alone. The whole of Russia is preparing for this journey." He got to his feet. "Now we can go."

They left without looking back. An enormous padlock hung on the shop's door.

Fyodor's detachment had built a barricade in one of the side streets opening on Ostozhenka Street.

Crates, boxes and bags filled with sand were piled up on the sidewalk and in the gutter, as well as barrels full of stones, old furniture and even a few horse-carts.

The White Guard Headquarters was on Ostozhenka. Fyodor and his people had been ordered to

prevent the cadets of a nearby Military School from breaking through to their Headquarters. Meanwhile, everything was quiet in the side street.

"Eh, our major forces have now arrived," was Fyodor's greeting to Pavel Sergeyevich and Alyosha.

"Hello, Uncle Fedya," said Alyosha, rather abashed.

"Hello yourself, soldier! You told me that at the front they'd nicknamed you Grasshopper, didn't you?"

"Uhuh, I did."

"All right, then, Grasshopper, take a rifle, since you're here."

"We'll show those fellows what fighting is," said Alyosha.

"Now we won't be scared by a whole army!" wisecracked one of the volunteers. Pavel Sergeyevich and Alyosha were given rifles and two full cartridge clips each.

"Don't you go shooting off into the blue," was somebody's warning to Alyosha.

"As if I didn't know," was his offended retort.

Apparently, they had been waiting in vain for the cadets: throughout the day they had had only two glimpses of grey coats at the far end of their side street and had fired a few shots at them. But somewhere nearby real battles were being fought. Frequent rifle discharges and machine-gun rat-tat-tats were heard.

"I should've gone with Lena and her flying squad," thought Alyosha. He didn't like to say this to Fyodor, but at last he could stand it no longer and asked to be excused.

"Well," said Fyodor, "maybe my hands are itching, too, but since the Committee decided that our place



was here it means that here we must stay. The Committee is our Headquarters. They've foreseen everything. And the side street we're squatting in—it is also a section of the front. A very small one, but just as important as the others.”

“Important—for counting crows.”

“Eh, Alyosha! And you a soldier!.. You know what a breakthrough is, don't you?”

“So what!”

“If we all went wherever we wanted to, what kind of defense would we have? A chain is no stronger than its weakest link.”

Alyosha understood, of course, that Fyodor was right, but he said:

“Huh, that's at war where great big armies fight.”

“And do you suppose the counter-revolutionaries have no teeth?”

“Yes, of course, they do,” admitted Alyosha unwillingly. “Only, while we're sitting snug here somebody else will break all those teeth.”

Although Fyodor had an angry, exasperated look on his face, he couldn't help himself and broke into a smile:

“All right, Grasshopper, hop away to your Lena, but look in on us in a day or two.”

Pavel Sergeyevich and Alyosha were given rifles and two full cartridge clips each.

Throughout the day they had had only two glimpses of grey coats at the far end of their side street and had fired a few shots at them.

AN EMPTY REVOLVER

A rainy, grey morning found him in front of the Church of the Conception, the meeting place of the first-aid teams. At first Lena didn't want to take him along, she begged him to stay home, but he wouldn't listen to her, he insisted that he was going anyway, and demanded a bag like hers with a red cross on it.

There was no spare bag, but Lena found a white armband for him and sewed a red cross on it. When the whole team had assembled everybody chipped in and supplied Alyosha with bandages, cottonwool and iodine. He wrapped his kit in strong wrapping paper; all day long he ran from place to place, holding the package under his arm.

The first casualty was picked up near Krymskaya Square. The man was lying close by the wall of a building, uttering subdued groans and paying no attention at all, it seemed, to the first-aid team. His wounds were swiftly dressed, he was placed on a stretcher and carried away. He didn't say a word while he was being taken to the nearest domestic hospital; he only groaned and looked at everybody, his eyes uncomprehending, fearful.

Then there were other wounded people... Still others... And others...

Severely wounded... Lightly wounded... All kinds.

A youth who had been wounded in the head called Alyosha "Vasyatka". Alyosha told him his name, but the boy went on saying: "Vasyatka, Vasyatka."

Later Alyosha was asked to help dig a trench. Bullets sang all around, everybody was hurrying everybody else, shouting: "Come on, hurry up, faster, faster!" There was really no need for this, since each person was doing his utmost: the deeper you dug yourself into the ground, the safer you were from bullets. One man was in a particular hurry, an elderly person in a black visor-cap. He was shouting more than anyone else; suddenly he stumbled over something and fell, face down, to the soft earth. His cap fell off and rolled away. He didn't get up. Alyosha picked up his cap, went up to him and said: "Get up." The man was silent. Alyosha turned him over—he was no longer breathing. A bullet had entered his mouth.

From time to time Lena appeared, Alyosha sometimes caught glimpses of her red-cross bag.

The shooting nearby abated, but it flared up at Zubovsky Square and Alyosha rushed over there.

"Hey! Hey, medical orderly!" cried somebody.

Alyosha didn't at once grasp that it was he who was being called, but when he turned around he saw a man hopping on one leg by a weather-beaten fence and waving to him.

"Come here, here, orderly!" shouted the man, waving his hand still more energetically and making a few hops in Alyosha's direction.

Alyosha turned to the man.

He was reaching for the iodine and bandages, but the wounded man said:

"You'll do the dressing later... Now lend me your shoulder."

Holding on to Alyosha, he began to hop clumsily.

"Let me dress your wound," offered Alyosha.

"Later, later... There's shooting going on here."

"Don't you worry," said Alyosha, "let me help you."

At this moment somebody knocked the package out from under his arm. Alyosha turned around—nobody.

"A bullet," flashed through his mind.

"What's wrong?" asked the wounded man and, without waiting for an answer, cried, "Down!"

Alyosha immediately fell to the ground while the wounded man got down on all fours. Alyosha wanted to help him, but the man said:

"Don't."

"Shall we crawl?"

"I can't."

"But you hopped," said Alyosha in surprise.

"Yes, I can hop. Well, all right, go on, put your dressing on."

Alyosha undid his package carefully—he was afraid the iodine bottle might have broken, but everything was intact.

"Tighten the bandage," said the wounded man.

"Uhuh."

"That's good," said the man, his face going pale. Then, in order, evidently, to change the subject, asked: "Were there a lot of us today?"

"What do you mean?" asked Alyosha.

"Were there many casualties, I asked."

"A lot."

"And yesterday?"

"I don't know. I was sitting idle yesterday."

"How come?"

Alyosha explained about his barricade.

"But this morning there was heavy fighting in those side streets," remarked the wounded man.

"Fighting?" asked Alyosha in dismay.

"The cadets tried to get through. Oh, well, let's get up. Let's hop again."

With difficulty they negotiated one street. The bandage was soaked in blood.

On the corner, near a grocery shop, they were fired on again. There was no place to lie down: everything was open to the view.

Somehow they managed to hide behind a small protrusion on the wall of a house, pressing themselves close to the cold brickwork.

"Oh, for a smoke," exclaimed the wounded volunteer, breathing heavily.

Alyosha had nothing to offer. He said, to make talk:

"Just you wait a bit. You'll have time for a smoke later."

"Have time," gasped the man. "I'm afraid not!"

His face was turning white, his lips—blue.

"Take off your armband," he said, "or they'll spot us."

Alyosha took the band off and pushed it into a pocket.

"What's your name?" mumbled the wounded man.

"Alyosha."

"Mine's Kuzma. Uncle Kuzma, see?"

"Uhuh."

"Now you remember it, and remember my last name, too: Sumyatin, did you hear me?"

"Of course I'll remember, nothing hard in that."

"I'm serious, kid."

"You don't mean you're preparing to quit, Uncle Kuzma?" Alyosha wanted to cheer him up, but his joke fell flat.

"I'm dizzy ... nauseous ... can barely stand."

"You lean on me," said Alyosha, although Kuzma was already almost hanging on his shoulders.

"I'm done for anyhow ... have no strength left at all... You go away alone, do you hear me?"

Alyosha wanted to say that he wouldn't go away, that he wasn't the kind of person who leaves another in trouble, but he only said:

"Stop that talk, please."

"Here," said Sumyatin, extending a revolver to Alyosha. "It's a heavy devil..."

Alyosha turned the drum—there were no shells in it. He shoved the revolver under his shirt.

Very close to them bullets pierced the wall with dry cracking sounds. Bits of brick flew out.

"They've found their range, the swine," thought Alyosha. He no longer had any strength to hold the wounded man up. If only he could lie down on the ground, but it was dangerous to move from this protruding piece of wall: they'd be wide open to the gunfire then.

When he was practically beginning to double up under Sumyatin's weight and the only thought he had was: "Don't fall ... don't fall ... don't fall..." a shadow

suddenly streaked, like black lightning, to their wall—a human being. This person caught up Sumyatin on the other side and cried:

“Quick!”

Alyosha couldn't see the stranger, he only felt that Sumyatin had become lighter.

“Faster,” said the stranger.

Only then did Alyosha understand, by the voice, that this was a woman.

“How can we move him?” asked Alyosha. “Just look how they're shooting.”

“Don't worry, I live right nearby, a stone's throw.” She pointed to the nearest door.

There actually were about forty-fifty steps to this door, but would they have strength to drag Sumyatin to it?

Alyosha tried to get a look at the woman. She was about forty. A rather elongated, dry face. Large, dark eyes, fear frozen in them. If he had met her before he never would have thought that such a woman would rush in where bullets flew. Well, what was the good of thinking—they couldn't stand here any longer: the wounded man was losing consciousness.

“Uncle Kuzma,” Alyosha freed one hand and nudged Sumyatin. “Uncle Kuzma, you'll hold up a bit more, won't you—up to that door over there...”

And the woman also said:

“Hold on, dearie.”

“Ughugh,” mumbled Sumyatin and compressed his lips.

Anna Ivanovna—that was the woman's name—

lived two floors up, in a low, small room right under the eaves.

After they had carried Sumyatin into the room and laid him down on a bed Alyosha fell to a chair standing by the small window; for some time he sat there without moving.

His eyes were dazzled, the floor under his feet seemed to rock. He still heard the sounds of shooting, or perhaps that was his heart beating so loudly? He just couldn't understand how they had managed to drag Sumyatin along the street, how they had got him up the narrow, squeaky staircase to this room.

Well, it was already all over now. Alyosha raised his eyes, looked around.

Their hostess was sitting on a stool in a corner, saying nothing. Sumyatin lay with closed eyes, mumbling inarticulately. "Must be delirious," thought Alyosha.

Almost half of the room was taken up by a rickety old wardrobe. The grey-papered sloping ceiling was covered with stains—apparently, the roof leaked. By the door stood an iron stove on short legs. The room looked uncomfortable to Alyosha. Its only bright spot was a flowerpot with red geraniums standing on the window-sill.

Alyosha looked out of the window. It opened on the street through which they had just made their way. Right opposite the house was a narrow side street. There was no shooting in it, but the pedestrians who appeared from time to time scuttered along cautiously from house to house: anything was apt to happen in the streets nowadays.

Meanwhile, the woman went to the stove, lifted a lid with a slight tinkle, and asked:

"Will you eat something?!"

All day long Alyosha had been rushing over the city, and hadn't had as much as a crumb in his mouth. He had felt no hunger, but as soon as Anna Ivanovna tinkled the pot-lid and asked whether he would eat, he felt that he was simply dying of hunger.

Anna Ivanovna was already kindling the fire in the stove.

"I've got a boy like you—he's been knocking around somewhere all day, too," she said.

While they were having the cabbage soup Alyosha learned that Anna Ivanovna was a charwoman in a pharmacy, that her husband was at the front and that her son Sanya had also "turned into a fighter". Last night he came home in a soldier's greatcoat.

Then Anna Ivanovna wanted to feed the wounded man. She lifted the pot, but Alyosha said:

"Let him sleep a while. When he wakes up we'll feed him."

Anna Ivanovna put a blanket over Sumyatin.

At that moment there was a tramping of feet on the landing, the door was flung open and two cadets with rifles in their hands, entered. Each one had a holster dangling from his belt.

They looked around the room, then one of them went to the window, looked out.

"Nothing could be better—you can see through the whole street. We're staying here, Levashov."

The one who was called Levashov, a tall young man with a small, thin moustache, also looked out and

nodded his head in agreement.

Alyosha and Anna Ivanovna froze in their places.

The cadet who had first gone to the window now stopped by the bed.

"Who's that?" he asked, pointing to Sumyatin.

Sumyatin opened his eyes slightly.

"It's my husband," said Anna Ivanovna, "don't you see—he's sick."

"They'll pull off the blanket—and we've had it," flashed through Alyosha's mind.

But the cadet never even touched the bedclothes.

He only asked:

"What's the matter with him?"

"Must be a fever. Unconscious for two days. I just don't know what to do. Perhaps you could advise me, sir?"

The cadet didn't listen to her. He was now looking at Alyosha.

"And what've you got to say for yourself?" he asked, making a step toward Alyosha.

"I'm ... we ... we're in the roofing business," said Alyosha, stalling. "If you need your roof fixed, we ... I ... with pleasure... Just as you say... We..."

"Stop your mumbling, fool," interrupted the cadet.

"That's right!" cried Anna Ivanovna, catching on. "I always tell him to listen to clever folk!"

"Your son, is he?" asked the cadet, looking from one face to the other.

"Yes," said Anna Ivanovna. "My boy."

"Doesn't look like you a bit."

"Born that way."

"Stop that tomfoolery!" shouted Levashov from the window. "You'll get no sense out of their sort!"

"Now, I say, if it's a roof that wants covering," Alyosha started again, "we won't refuse..."

"Shut your trap!" barked Levashov. "Get over here, Kulchitsky. This is no market-place!"

The cadets settled themselves at the window and stuck the ends of their rifles out from it.

"I c'n run to the market for you, it won't take me long... In an eyeblink..."

"Didn't I tell you to shut up?"

"Just as you like, sir," said Alyosha with a helpless gesture and fell silent.

How was he to get outside and warn the volunteer fighters about this ambush? Maybe the cadets would let him go, would pay no attention.

"Mom, I'll go out to buy bread," he said.

"Go ahead," said Anna Ivanovna, "go."

"Stay where you are!" cried Levashov.

Alyosha scratched his head worriedly.

"There's no bread in the house. We've got no bread."

"So you'll have to wait," barked Levashov. "I forbid you to go out of the room."

The cadets started to talk in low voices, throwing glances out of the window.

"What shall I do?" thought Alyosha. "Attack them? No, I won't be able to manage both of them. And they're armed to the teeth... Oh, if there were shells in the revolver..."

At this moment running footsteps were again heard

on the stairs. Then someone began to wipe his feet on the mat before the door.

"Sanya!" Anna Ivanovna dashed to the door.

"Back!" shouted Levashov, unbuckling his holster and getting to his feet.

The door opened and in it appeared a youngster of about fifteen. Alyosha immediately understood that this was Anna Ivanovna's son: the same narrow face, sharp nose and short stature.

"Come on in," said Levashov, waving a hand and fastening his holster. "Don't stand in the doorway."

Sanya hesitatingly crossed the threshold, looking from his mother to the cadets and to Alyosha.

"Sanya," said his mother, stepping toward him, "we've been waiting for you, Alyosha and I, getting worried. Such doings—shooting in the streets. And then these gentlemen came in," she gestured toward the cadets, "and they don't allow us to go out."

"Sanya," cried Alyosha and dashed to embrace the newcomer. "Brother!"

But Sanya could understand nothing. He just stood there blinking his eyes.

"And who's that?" he finally asked, nodding to the bed on which Sumyatin lay.

It was such an absurd question that neither Anna Ivanovna nor Alyosha could find anything to say.

"So you don't recognize your own Daddy?" smirked Levashov, who was attentively watching the "brothers". He went up to the bed. "The comedy is over. Get up!" and he pushed Sumyatin's shoulder.

But Sumyatin didn't move, he didn't even open his eyes. So the cadet pulled off the blanket in one swift movement. He was not even very surprised when he saw that the "patient" was fully dressed and his foot was covered with a dressing through which blood was seeping copiously.

"A fever, indeed," said Levashov. "Just you take a look, Kulchitsky."

The second cadet also came to the bed and stood at Levashov's side.

For a short moment they turned their backs to Alyosha.

He pushed his hand into his shirt. The revolver had become so warm, it seemed to burn his fingers. His heart was beating madly. "Eh, if only I had some shells!" flitted through his mind, but he could think no more because Kulchitsky turned around.

Alyosha jerked out his hand holding the revolver, buttons flew from his jacket to the floor.

"Hands up!" he shouted wildly, aiming his firearm at the cadets. "Hands!.. I'm going to shoot!"

Levashov immediately turned, too. But Alyosha had him covered, also. The cadets were standing so close to each other that Alyosha could easily move his aim from one to the other.

"Sanya," he said, "disarm them, and you, Anna Ivanovna, hurry out and get our men over."

Sanya had at last caught on. He readily darted to the cadets and removed their revolvers from the holsters.

"Give them to me," requested Alyosha.

He cocked the triggers on both revolvers, extended



one to Sanya: "You keep yours aimed at that long guy," Alyosha indicated Levashov with a nod. "Shoot at once if he gets funny. Anna Ivanovna, why don't you go?"

"I'm afraid."

"You weren't afraid before, were you? So why be scared now?" asked Alyosha in disappointment. "The shooting was worse in the street before."

"I'm afraid to leave you," explained Anna Ivanovna.

"What's there to be afraid of," said Alyosha with annoyance. "We've got these two cannons, see?" And he rocked his revolver in his hand.

"Not two, but three," corrected Sanya.

"No, two. Mine had no shells in it."

"Idiot!.." ejaculated Levashov, gnashing his teeth and glancing at Kulchitsky. "It's all your fault, you nincompoop!"

"And what about you," retorted Kulchitsky.

The cadets glared angrily at each other.

"No talking!" ordered Alyosha.

"Idiot," repeated Levashov. "What a..."

"Get down!" was Alyosha's next command.

Levashov and Kulchitsky remained standing.

"Quickly!" Alyosha fired two shots over their heads.

The cadets threw themselves to the floor.

"That's better," said Alyosha, winking at Sanya.

The cadets were standing so close to each other that Alyosha could easily move his aim from one to the other.

Anna Ivanovna took a look at the prostrated cadets, at the two boys with the revolvers in their hands, and then moved unwillingly to the door.

"Oh, well, all right, I'll fetch them," she uttered. Her footsteps rapidly pattered down the stairs.

"...MY BARRICADE"

Next morning Alyosha and Lena set out to join Fyodor. They made short cuts through courtyards, climbed over several fences and came out directly to the barricade. The fighters did not even notice how the brother and sister suddenly appeared among them.

"How did you get here?" asked Fyodor running to them. His forehead was done up in a rag.

Alyosha explained.

"We're saved, brothers!" exclaimed Fyodor jokingly, pulling Alyosha's cap down low over his eyes.

The detachment was cut off from their own people, cartridges were coming to an end, they had neither bread nor water.

Lena immediately began to attend to the wounded men. Alyosha wanted to help her, but Fyodor called him aside.

"Alyosha, if we don't get any cartridges we're finished. We won't be able to hold the barricade. Our side street is full of cadets. We just repulsed an attack."

"I'll run and get some from our neighbours," exclaimed Alyosha, indicating a second barricade, almost at the corner of Ostozhenka.

Fyodor smiled fleetingly.

"That we could have done ourselves. See that church?"

"So what?"

"The cadets hoisted a machine-gun to its belfry. They can't get at us—the house is in the way..."

"Aha, a dead zone," interpolated Alyosha.

"Right. But about forty steps from here you'll stand out like a sore thumb. Three of our men tried to get through—and what happened? Your Lena is bandaging one, while the other two ... they're still lying where they fell. So we'll have to get cartridges from some other place. You understand me, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

Alyosha began to rack his brain about where to find cartridges. He suddenly remembered the wallpaper shop. A week ago several cases of cartridges had been delivered together with rolls of wallpaper. The cases were immediately walled up. But Pavel Sergeyevich had asked that one be left out. "We may need it today, tomorrow, or at any moment. Let it stay in the bale." Nobody had come for the case during the following two days. Maybe it had been taken away later. Alyosha wasn't sure, but he thought that perhaps it might still be there.

"Where is Pavel Sergeyevich?" he asked Fyodor.

"He was called to the Committee."

"When?"

"Right after you left, on that same day. Why do you ask?"

"Well, there's something I have to ask him," faltered Alyosha: he didn't want to raise false hopes.

"It's no use to look for Pavel, it's unlikely that he's sitting in the Committee. You'll only lose time."

"All right then, here I go."

"Try not to be long!" Fyodor called after him.

There was shooting everywhere. Alyosha also streaked like a bullet through the streets. Somewhere beyond Kudrinskaya Square cannons boomed. "Must be in the Vagankov cemetery," thought Alyosha. On the preceding day a wounded man had told him that artillery pieces were mounted there.

Alyosha reached the shop uneventfully. He opened the cellar door with his own key, dashed to the bales and moved them aside... There it was, the marked bale. Alyosha cut the cords, jerked away the wrapping paper, tearing it: rolls of wallpaper fell to the floor... The case! It was there! Alyosha pulled off its lid and swiftly filled his bag and pockets with cartridges, then he hurried to get back to the barricade. In the arched gateway of a nearby house he suddenly came face to face with a White Guard officer.

"Stop!" shouted the man, aiming his rifle at the boy. "What are you carrying? Where are you going?"

"Please let me go! I'm running to my brother—he's a cadet. They've run out of cartridges and they have to break through to Ostozhenka, to Headquarters." Alyosha pressed the bag to his chest.

"Very well," said the officer, "we'll go there together."

While Alyosha was thinking of how to escape, shooting started from quite nearby. No sooner had the White Guard officer hidden himself behind the iron

gates than Alyosha sprinted headlong through a communicating courtyard.

When he reached the barricade many hands stretched out to his bag.

"Grasshopper! What a godsend you are!" exclaimed the fighters as they filled their clips.

"Now we'll show them!"

When the cadets again appeared, one by one, like grey mice, pressing themselves against a wall, intending to launch a new attack, the barricade, which had almost ceased shooting, greeted them with fierce volleys of gunfire. The skirmish line of the cadets faltered, fell apart and dispersed.

Silence reigned in the side street. Granted a short respite, the fighters moved boxes, crates and sandbags closer together.

Suddenly...

Rat-tat-tat-tat... The machine-gun in the belfry opened fire. Alyosha looked around. Behind the barricade, on the sidewalk, just where the dead zone ended, lay a young boy. He raised himself a little, crawled a few steps with difficulty, and again fell, face down, to the ground.

"He's wounded," was Alyosha's thought. He darted toward the boy.

"Get back!" "Stop!" cried the men from the barricade.

But Alyosha was already at the side of the wounded boy. So was Lena, on her knees with her medical kit.

Rat-tat-tat-tat... Again the machine-gun spouted fire.

The brother and sister both fell. Lena was badly wounded in both legs, Alyosha—in the chest and the abdomen.

November 1, 1917.

Alyosha had been unconscious for four days, now he opened his eyes and saw his mother and Fyodor at his side.

"Darling Lyosha," faltered his mother, her cheeks trembling, jerking.

Alyosha wanted to say something, but he only moved his lips slightly.

"Don't talk, Grasshopper, don't talk," murmured Fyodor. His face was grey, while his eyes had somehow become very large.

"Lena ... is she alive?"

The mother wanted to answer, but couldn't.

"Yes, she's alive, boy," answered Fyodor.

"Mummy, farewell... And tell Lena..."

The mother kept nodding her head, swallowing her tears. Alyosha closed his eyes, and then asked in a barely audible whisper:

"Is... my ... holding up?"

"Who do you mean?" asked Fyodor, bending over closer.

"My ... my barricade."

"Yes, dear boy, it is, it's holding up."

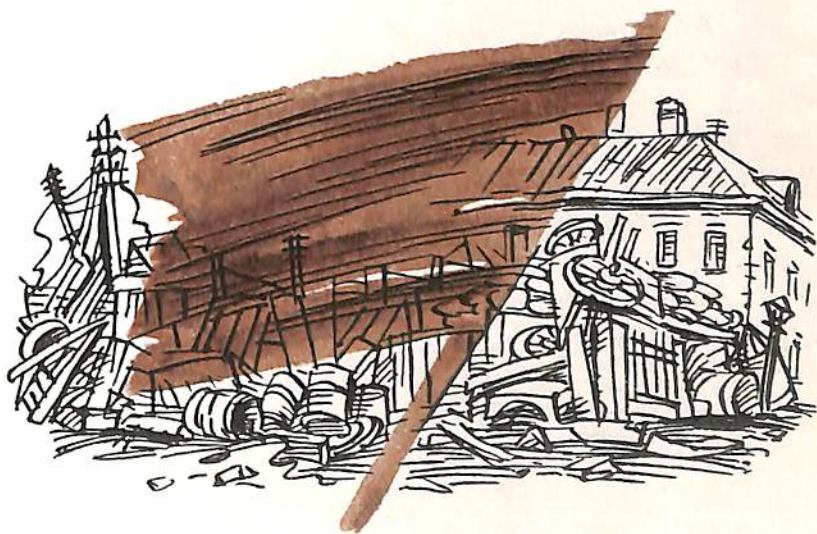
Alyosha fell silent. His mother and Fyodor said nothing, either.

"Let it ... hold up for a long time," whispered Alyosha. "Forever."

"Yes, Grasshopper, it will hold staunchly for a long time."

But Alyosha already heard nothing. His heart had stopped beating.

The barricade held fast another four days. Then it was taken apart. It was no longer needed: the Revolution had triumphed in Moscow.



REQUEST TO READERS

Raduga Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send all your comments to 17, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR.

**NEW BOOKS
FROM RADUGA PUBLISHERS**

**NESTAIKO V.
In Sun-Spot Land**

The jolly land called the Haven of Good Friends is in mortal danger: the wicked magician Gloom has decided to destroy it. The boy called Freckles and his friends the Sun Spots go into battle against the evil forces of dark. The colour illustrations are by Olga Pushkareva.





